

The Confession of Downfalls

The Confession Sutra
with commentary by
Arya Nagarjuna

The Practice of Vajrasattva
with Sadhana

supplemented by verbally
transmitted commentaries from
Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey
Geshe Rabten
Geshe Khyentse
Thubten Zopa Rinpoche

translated and edited by
Brian C. Beresford

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Foreword

This volume on the two fundamental methods of Buddhist psychological purification is being reprinted here under a new title *Confession of Downfalls.* This change has been necessitated by suggestions we have received from our Translation Department and a number of practitioners that the original title was quite unclear and misleading.

Included are general explanations on the main *sutra* and *tantra* forms of mental purification: the *Confession Sutra* and the *Practice of Vajrasattva.*

This comprehensive presentation has been edited and translated by Brian C. Beresford of our Translation Bureau while working closely under the guidance of several Tibetan Lamas and translators. He has extensively annotated the translations with references to other related publications together with explanations and definitions drawn from traditional Tibetan sources in order to clarify newly-coined English terms.

It is hoped that this meditational manual, in shedding more light on the implication behind the rich language of Buddhist philosophy, will be of help to others engaging in the task of translation as well as provide the general reader with the deeper insight into the scope of Tibetan Buddhist thought and practice.

Gyatsho Tshering
Director, LTWA

March 1992

Preface

The following work on two fundamental purification practices of the Tibetan Mahayana tradition is intended primarily for those who are seriously interested in approaching the transformational psychology of higher Buddhist meditations. As such it is based purely on the traditional oral teachings of Tibetan meditation masters, supplemented by an explanation from the Indian Buddhist commentaries *(bstan-'gyur).*

Instructions to meditational practices such as these should not be merely a source of intellectual stimulation. Instead, they should be viewed in the context of an individual's approach to meditation. Although the realisation which is the outcome of such spiritual practices lies beyond intellect, Buddhism stresses the necessity of first gaining a broad understanding of philosophical principles and meditational techniques. With such an understanding as a basis, one becomes better equipped to engage in the actual meditation. Thus, commentaries of this nature should serve to enrich one's understanding of a specific Dharma practice, which in turn will benefit one's approach to life.

All terms have been rendered into English in order to convey as precisely as possible the sense they evoke in the original. When a newly-used term first appears it is followed by its Tibetan spelling and Sanskrit equivalent and is generally accompanied by an explanation based on either the Indian or Tibetan traditional sources.

Nagarjuna, the composer of the Indian commentary to the *Confession of Downfall,* is considered to have lived during the first and second centuries A.D. However, according to and an interpretation of the Wheel of Time *(dus-kyi 'khor-lo, kalacakra)* by the Tibetan P'ug-pa Lhun-drub gya-tso, Nagar-

juna lived from 481 B.C. till A.D. 120.[1] He is renowned for having codified the Madhyamaka,[2] or Middle Way philosophy, based on the teachings of his master, the great saint Saraha.[3] The doctrine of the Middle Way clarifies Buddha Śhakyamuni's teachings on the profound subject of emptiness *(stong-pa-nyid, sunyata),* elucidating the true nature of reality. Nagarjuna wrote numerous treatises on *sutra, tantra* and medicine, and although some scholars believe these commentaries to be written by several people all bearing the name Nagarjuna, the Tibetan tradition considers the authorship to be one and the same.

The excerpts presented here from Nagarjuna's commentary were translated with the kind assistance of L.T. Doboom Tulku who also checked the translation of the *sutra* itself. The Tibetan commentary to the *Confession of Downfalls* is based on an oral explanation given by Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey and translated by Sherpa Tulku at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in October 1974. The additional explanation of an alternate visualization is from a teaching given by Thubten Zopa Rinpoche at the International Mahayana Institute, Kathmandu, in January 1975. The *Practice of Vajrasattva* is based on an explanation by Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, translated by Sherpa Tulku, and by Geshe Rabten, translated by Gonsar Tulku in July 1975. Additional clarification was given by Gegen Khyents from Manali and translated by Gerado Aboud in May 1976. Suggestions for the English rendition were given Jonathan Landaw, Michael Lewis and Jampa Gendun (Stanford Jaffe). Without their kindness this work would not have been possible. May it be of benefit for those with sincere interest.

August 1976 Brian Beresford
Dharamsala

Notes and References

1. According to this interpretation, Buddha Śakyamuni passed into Parinirvana in 881 B.C. after having lived eighty-one years and two months. Cf. P.J. Hopkins, *Meditation on Emptiness,* published on demand by University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, U.S.A. and High Wycomb, U.K. Although this date is in conflict with Western chronology which calculates Buddha's birthdate as circa 433 B.C., the emphasis within the Tibetan tradition is placed not on pin-pointing the historical existence of Buddhist figures but on understanding the essence of what they taught.
2. The philosophical system of the "Middle Way" is termed in Sanskrit as Madhyamika *(dbu-ma)* and a follower of the system is known as a Madhyamika *(dbu-ma-pa),* as pointed out by the Sanskritist Prof. Jai Deva Singh.
3. For an account of Saraha's teachings cf. H.V. Guenther, *The Royal Song of Saraha,* Berkeley Shambhala Publications, 1973.



Avalolketisvara

General Introduction

Homage to great compassion, exalted Avalokitesvara

All living beings desire happiness and wish to avoid suffering, and there are many ways to achieve this. Although many people endeavour to attain happiness by material means, while yielding a limited amount of satisfaction, such means bring no ultimate peace to the mind. One of the main functions of spiritual systems is the balancing of material progress with mental development and this balance is particularly emphasised in Buddhism.

A Buddhist is distinguished from non-Buddhists by seeking refuge in the Three Rare and Supreme Jewels *(dkon-mdiog-gsum, triratna)* - the Fully Awakened Being *(sangs-rgyas, buddha),* Truth *(chos, dharma)* and those Intent on Virtue *(dge-'dun, sangha).*[1] Within Buddhism there are followers of the Low Vehicle *(theg-dman, hinayana)* and those of the Great Vehicle *(theg-chen, mahayana).* Low Vehicle practitioners feel trepidation about the pitfalls and pains of the world and seek liberation from these for themselves alone. The Great Vehicle followers also feel these miseries but resolve to attain the fully awakened state, or *Buddhahood (byang-chub, bodhi)*[2] solely to be able to exercise the skilful means necessary to release all beings from their sufferings. Such practitioners are known as Awakening Warriors *(byang-chub sems-dpa', bodhisattva)*[3] because, like a warrior, they courageously undergo any hardship in order to conquer all emotional and psychological afflictions *(nyon-mongs, klesa)* and their traces.

The initial object of Buddhist meditational practices is the preparations of one's mind for the most profound topic of meditation, the emptiness of all phenomena, the very nature of reality. The Great Vehicle, as practised in Tibet,

accomplishes this preparation by means of purification practices designed to eliminate as rapidly as possible all traces of wrong and detrimental past actions. The predominance of these latent traces of neurotic tendencies presents obstacles to deeper meditational practices. It is for this reason that so great an emphasis is placed on the means by which one cleanses oneself of them.

One must become a suitable vessel to receive the teachings. Prerequisite are such meditations as tranquil absorption *(zhi-gnas,samatha)* and penetrative insight *(Ihag-mthong, vipasyana)* which gradually lead one towards the more profound practices such as the Great Middle Way *(dbu-ma chen-po, mahamadhyamaka),* the Great Seal *(phyag-rgya chen-po, mahamudra),* the Great Completeness *(rdzogs-pa chen-po, mahasandhi)* and Tantrayana. If the seeds of wrongs and unskilful actions are not purified, it will be extremely difficult to see the true nature of reality no matter how much effort one may make.

Since the object of these purification practices is the eradication of neuroses and past evil, or sin *(sdig-pa, papa),* one might ask, "What is sin?"

Blown about by the winds of their own actions *(las, karma)* sentient beings from beginningless time have been uncontrollably circling through the various realms of existence. By not being aware *(ma-rig-pa, avidya)* of the actual nature of reality, they have committed unwholesome actions leading to the experience of suffering in one form or another. Such unskilful actions constitute neuroses or sins,[5] and they can be manifested in many different ways.

In everyday life we perform many unskilful actions motivated by greed, jealousy, arrogance and aggression. In addition, if as Buddhists we have taken certain commitments and break these commitments, for instance, that of not harming other beings, this is an instance of neurotic or

evil action. Furthermore, if the vows or bonds *(sdom-pa, samvara)* of the Awakening Warriors or of *tantra* have been taken, they may be transgressed frequently or weakened through lack of awareness in actions of body, speech and 'mind. The process of cleansing unskilful tendencies can be hastened by engaging in the confession and Vajrasattva practices, either individually or jointly.

Those who wish to experience reality through the meditations of the Great Vehicle, should engage in both the ordinary and extraordinary preliminary practices *(sngon-'gro)*. The former involve meditating on the four topics that revert the mind *(blo-ldog rnam-bzlii)* from worldly preoccupations. These are the meditations on the precious human body, death and impermanence; actions and their effects; and the faults of cyclic existence *('khor-ba, samsara)*. It is essential to perform these four contemplations before each meditation session because they give energy and strength to the mind, ensuring that one will not be distracted from the main object of the practice. They are the foundation of all higher meditations and, if they are neglected in preference to more 'advanced practices', it would be like trying to construct a glorious mansion on top of an iceberg. The following is an abbreviated discussion of these four important and fundamental topics.

One should contemplate on how extremely difficult it is to obtain a human birth with all the eighteen freedoms and endowments[8] essential for the practice of Dharma. In finding them all present in oneself, one will realise that this is an infinitely rare and precious opportunity to accomplish the ultimate purpose of life through inner development.[9] However, although one may have such a precious human birth, it is important to bear in mind the fact that, like all things, one is impermanent and eventually will die. Furthermore, the time of death is uncertain and there are

innumerable circumstances leading to the termination of life. When death does come, the only thing that will help in obtaining a fortunate birth again will be the force of the wholesome actions one has performed based on an awareness of the law of actions and their effects.

Skilful actions will lead to happiness while unskilful ones are invariably the cause of misery. Knowing this, one should abandon the three unwholesome actions of body (killing, stealing and sexual misconduct), the four of speech (lying, slander, harsh words and foolish chatter) and the three of mind (greed, hatred and holding wrong views). To realise that even slightly unskilful actions result in obstructions to practice, will impel one to refrain from ever committing them.

If one does not eradicate them, the ripening of a single instinctive propensity *(bag-chags, vasana)* from one wrong action may, at death, defile one's next birth. In such a less fortunate state of existence the practice of Dharma and the attainment of happiness will be even more difficult.

The six sub-realms constituting the desire realm *('dod-kiiams, kamaloka)* of cyclic existence are differentiated according to the degree of misery they entail. Traditionally, these are taught in terms of specific realms but can also be understood as reflections of psychological states of existence.[10] Lowest are the hell realms where beings suffer for extensive lengths of time from the extreme misery of intense heat or cold. The hungry spirits suffer from insatiable hunger and unquenchable thirst. Animals must endure bondage in service, stupidity and fear of being eaten. Humans undergo the miseries of birth, sickness, aging and death. Demi-gods suffer from intense jealousy towards the gods. The gods indulge in soporific sensory gratification and then at death suffer great distress when they are about to fall into a lower realm.

Sentient beings continually circle through these realms, by committing new unskilful actions. These actions plant propensities on their minds that ripen at death, causing rebirth within anyone of these states. Therefore, when we realise the whole of cyclic existence as unsatisfactory, we will become detached from its enticements and will try with determination to find some way to pass beyond it.

The transcendence of all misery was taught by Buddha Śakyamuni by pointing out the way to its cessation. This complete cessation of all misery is the fully awakened state and is accomplished by removing the two veils that obscure the true radiance of mind. These are known as the obscuring emotional afflictions *(nyon-mongs-pa'i sgrib-pa, klesavarana)* and the obscuration of omniscience *(shes-bya'i sgrib-pa, jneyavarana)*. With self-effort and proper instruction from a fully qualified spiritual master, these obscurations can be removed, thus revealing the true nature of mind free from all discursive conceptions *(rnam-rtog, vikalpa)* and conflicting emotions. The fully awakened state is not far away, rather its potential innately abides within one's mind and is fully manifested when the mind is purified of grasping at neurotic instincts, unskilful actions and their stains.

There are generally four extraordinary preliminaries in regard to approaching *tantric* practices. The first, going for refuge, leads the mind away from non-Buddhist paths; the second, activating the awakening mind *(byang-duib-kyi-sems, bodhicitta)*, leads it away from the lesser paths of the Hearers *(nyan-thos, sravaka)* and Solitary Realisers *(rang-rgyal, pratyekabuddha)*. These two preliminaries are sometimes practised together with prostrations and are common to both *sutra* and *tantra*, while the remaining two are exclusive to *tantra*. The third, recitation and meditation of Vajrasattva, the adamantine-minded warrior, purifies adverse circumstances such as neuroses and mental

obscurations. And the fourth, unification with the spiritual master *(bla-ma'i rnal-tyor, guru-yoga)* accumulates merit and instills blessings providing one with circumstances conducive for higher practices.[122]

Tibetan traditions employ various methods by which one can engage in these preliminary practices. Some require the practitioner to perform at least one set of 100,000 repetitions of each preliminary before venturing into higher practices. Other traditions emphasis their concurrent practice with *tantra* and higher studies. Within each tradition, and for individual disciples, details of practice may vary. This variation reflects the skilful means of the masters in leading disciples according to their individual dispositions and capacities. It is not the case that one system is higher than another. All Tibetan traditions employ techniques that lead to the same goal.

The most important prerequisite for successful Buddhist meditation is finding a qualified spiritual master with whom one feels a strong affinity and to follow his teachings with unflinching devotion while not disparaging any other religious tradition.

The following fundamental explanations of the *Confession of Downfalls,* which is a general means of purification, and *Vajrasattva,* which is specifically used in meditations involving the *tantric* path, are meant to be practised while under the guidance of a spiritual master. They may either be followed as presented here, or as modified by his personal instructions. If they are included within one's daily practice, they will certainly lead to meditational development and insight, which will benefit oneself and, ultimately, others. As in all Great Vehicle meditations, they should be preceded by and accompanied with sincere refuge in the Three Supreme Jewels and the activation of the awakening mind that aspires towards and ventures into the practices

for fully awakening one's pristine awareness *(ye-shes, jnana)* in order to benefit all sentient beings.

Notes and References

1. Although literally *sangha* means spiritual aspirants 'intent on virtue,' it specifically refers to a superior person *('phags-pa'i gang-zag, aryapudgala),* who has reached the path of seeing *(mthong-lam, darsana-marga),* the initial level of direct perception of emptiness as specified according to either the tenets of Low or Great Vehicle.
2. *Bodhi* literally means the state of 'pristine purity and consummate fulfilment.' Päl-trul Rinpoche (dpal-sprul rin-po-che, b. 1808) in his *Word Commentary to Śantideva's Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life (Bodhisattvacaryavatara),* fol. 13-14, states:

   > ...because of being separated from stain, it *(bodhi)* is pristine purity since that which is to be abandoned, the two obscurations together with their instincts, have been purified. It is the consummate fulfilment because that which is to be realized, primordial awareness, is the consummate fulfilment of all excellent qualities.

   Traditionally there are said to be three *bodhis* corresponding to the goals of the three types of dharma practitioners: the Hearers, the Solitary Realiser and the Awakening Warriors. The former two are Low Vehicle practitioners who seek liberation from cyclic existence for themselves alone. The goal of an Awakening Warrior is known as the 'great awakening' *(byang-chub chen-po, mahabodhi)* and is synonymous with the state of a fully awakened being *(sang rgyas gyi go-'phang).* This last connotation is the context in which the terms are generally used and thus *bodhi* may be referred to as the fully awakened state.

3. Pal-trul Rinpoche in his *Word Commentary,* written by his disciple Khän-ch'en Kun-zang Päl-dan (mkhan-chen kun-bzang-dpal-ldan), states that an Awakening Warrior

> ...is a warrior *(sems-dpa', sattva,* literally one who has a 'heroic mind') since he courageously, without holding back, practices that which is difficult, performing deeds, such as giving his head and limbs to others in order to attain Full Awakening.

Also in the *Composition in Two Sections (sgra-'sbyor bam-po gnyis-pa),* one of the earliest Sanskrit-Tibetan dictionaries compiled during the reign of King Räl-pa-chan (c. 9th cent), Bodhisattva is explained as follows in accordance with the Sanskrit definition:

> *Bodhi* means pristine *(byang)* consummation *(chub)* (or full awakening); *sattva* means heroic mind or a mind acting with great strength. Thus an Awakening Warrior acts with one pointed courage and without hesitation to accomplish unsurpassable Full Awakening.

4. "Emotional and psychological afflictions" are defined as secondary mental events that make the mind extremely unpeaceful. They are the fundamental causes of suffering and dissatisfaction. The Tibetan translation literally means 'insanity-gloom' *(nyon-mongs)* and it appears in English translations as delusions, mental defilements, conflicting emotions, afflictions, disturbing conceptions, psychological negativities and so forth.
5. If the motivation, or thought that arises to cause an action *(rgyu'i kun-slong)* is virtuous, the action will always be virtuous irrespective of the thoughts arising at the time of committing the action *(dus-kyi-kun-slong).* For example, Buddha in a previous incarnation as King Sarthavaha Sattvanana (ded-dpon snying-rje-can) killed a man known as the blackman who held a lance in his hands *(mi-nag mdung-*

thung-can). Buddha saw that this man had the intention to take the lives of 499 passengers on a ship and to plunder its cargo. The king felt great compassion for the blackman to save him from the consequences of the evil act he was about to commit and, in order to save the lives and wealth of the passengers, he killed the man. Because the king's motivation was virtuous, his action did not constitute a complete sin although his thought at the time of killing was non-virtuous, since killing itself is generally wrong. Likewise, if the thought that arises to cause and action is unwholesome, then the thought arising at the time of the action is always unwholesome and as such is a 'wrong[7] or 'sin' *(sdig-pa, papa)* implanting neuroses on the mind.

6. In order to fully break a vow, pledge or sworn commitment one must have present in the mind at the time of the act the four binding factors that render a transgression complete. They are: (1) not regarding the act as a mistake, not considering it as a non-virtuous action; (2) not desiring to turn away from such action, not regretting it; (3) committing the act with great pleasure, joy and satisfaction; and (4) having no sense of personal shame or embarrassment at its effect on others. These four factors apply to infractions of pledges in general excepting the ninth and eighteenth of the root Bodhisattva vows and the fifth root *tantric* pledge, i.e. (9) maintaining views contrary to Buddha's teachings such as disbelief in the law of cause and effect of actions, being sectarian, not believing in the Three Supreme Jewels and so forth; and (18), which is the same as the fifth *tantric* pledge, giving up the awakening mind, and discarding from one's heart working for the ultimate benefit of others, acting out of base motivations such as the desire for fame, money and so on while pretending to hold the highest motivation. These three pledges require only the act itself to render them invalid.
7. Cf. Geshe Rabten, *The Preliminary Practices,* Wang-ch'ug Dorje the Ninth Karmapa, *The Mahamudra Eliminating the Dark-*

ness of Ignorance and also Kalu Rinpoche, *The Foundation of Buddhist Meditation,* published by the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.

8. These eighteen qualities are explained in H.V. Guenther's *Treasures on the Tibetan Middle Way,* Shambhala, Berkeley, 1973, p. 78 n.1, and p. 80, n.3. Also Thog-me Zang-po (thogs-med bzang-po) in his commentary on Santideva's *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* states:

> ...life in hell, as a ghost or animal, as a barbarian or long-living celestial being, as a person holding wrong views, being born when a fully awakened being has not appeared or as an idiot, are the eight states devoid of freedom to practice Dharma. Being a human in a central Buddhist country, with senses complete, not having reverted to unbounded actions, having faith in the doctrine, living when a fully awakened being has come and has taught the Truth, while the doctrine is still flourishing, when there are realized followers of it and when there are benefactors are the ten endowments.

9. In the context of Highest Yoga Tantra *(rnal-'byor bla-med kyi-rgyud, anuttarayogatantra).* the significance of the 'precious human body' is that it is the only body endowed with the psychic channels *(rtsa, nadi),* the motility or 'energy wind' *(rlung, vayu)* and the essential drop or energy *(thig-le, bindu)* together with the ability to control them, all of which are necessary in order to generate extremely subtle levels of consciousness.

10. Cf. Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism,* Shambhala, Berkeley, 1973, pp. 138-148.

21. *Sutra (mdo)* according to Dr. L.M. Joshi in the *Tibet Journal* vol. 2, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, 1976. p. 73. "...means a 'thread'. A *sutra* is a sacred text containing the Buddha's discourse; it is supposed to give

authentic information or knowledge about Dharma." *Tantra (rgyud* means 'continuum' and the teachings of *tantra* deal with esoteric subjects that generally require a full empowerment *(dbang, abhiseka)* before their meaning can be revealed.

12. In the extraordinary preliminaries the offering of the *mandala* can be included in the practice of unification with the spiritual master. The *mandala* symbolises offering the entire universe to the spiritual master whose essence is the same as all Fully Awakened Beings. In this case, because one is giving up everything, one consequence is the development of detachment, or renunciation from worldly attractions. For an elaborate explanation of the preliminary practices as followed in Karma Kargyu tradition, cf. Jamgon Kongtrul, *The* Torch *of Certainty,* J. Hanson, transl., Boulder & London, Shambhala, 1977.
13. For an explanation of the qualities of a spiritual master cf. *The Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion* prepared by the Translation Bureau of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, 1975.
14. *Jnana* in Sanskrit etymologically means merely 'awareness' or 'cognitiveness' *(shes-pa).* The Tibetan translators, in order to distinguish this from an ordinary awareness, added *ye (ye-shes)* meaning 'from the beginning,' 'original,' 'primordial' or 'pristine.' It is the uncontaminated awareness that has existed from beginningless time, but has been covered by the clouds of conflicting emotions and their traces. Primordial awareness is revealed through practice by means of the discriminating sword of 'intelligent awareness' *(shes-rab, prajna),* the mental activity which cuts through one's innate tendency to grasp at an ego identity and to believe that phenomena have some independent, inherent existence. Both *jnana* and *prajna* are often translated as 'wisdom.'

Part1
The Confession Sutra

The Sutra of Three Heaps
The Indian Commentary
The Tibetan Commentary



Nagarjuna

The Sutra of Three Heaps

Sanskrit: Triskandhadharmasutra
Tibetan: Phung-po gsum-pa'i mdo
(Translated from Tibetan)

Namo: The Declaration of an Awakening Warrior's Downfalls

I, who am called by the name..., throughout all time seek refuge in the Spiritual Master;
in the Fully Awakened Being I seek refuge;
in his Truth of Dharma I seek refuge;
in the Spiritual Aspirants I seek refuge.

To the Teacher, the Endowed Transcendent Destroyer, the One Thus-Gone, the Foe Destroyer, the Completely Perfected, Fully Awakened Being, the Subduer from the Śakya clan, I pay homage.

To the Great Destroyer with the Adamantine Essence I pay homage.
To the Jewel Radiating Light I pay homage.
To the Ruling King of the Serpent Spirits I pay homage.
To the Leader of the Warriors I pay homage.
To the One Pleased to be a Warrior I pay homage.
To the Jewel Fire I pay homage.
To the Jewel Moonlight I pay homage.
To the One with Vision and a Purpose I pay homage.
To the Jewel Moon I pay homage.
To the Stainless One I pay homage.
To the Bestower of Courage I pay homage.
To the Pure One I pay homage.
To the One who Gives out of Purity I pay homage.
To the Water Deity I pay homage.

To the God of the Water Deities I pay homage.
To the Glorious Good I pay homage.
To the Glorious Sandalwood I pay homage.
To the One of Unlimited Splendour I pay homage.
To the Glorious Light I pay homage.
To the Glorious One without Sorrow I pay homage.
To the Son of the Passionless One I pay homage.
To the Glorious Flower I pay homage.
To the One Thus-Gone who Understands Clearly, Enjoying the Radiant Light of Purity I pay homage.
To the One Thus-Gone who Understands Clearly, Enjoying the Radiant Light of the Lotus I pay homage.
To the Glorious Gem I pay homage.
To the Glorious One who is Mindful I pay homage.
To the Glorious One whose Name is Extremely Renowned I pay homage.
To the King of the Victory Banner of the Pinnacle of Sensory Powers I pay homage.
To the Glorious One who Vanquishes Utterly Within I pay homage.
To the One who is Utterly Victorious in Battles Within I pay homage.
To the One who has Transcended by Vanquishing Within I pay homage.
To the Glorious One who Enhances and Illuminates Totally I pay homage.
To the One who Subdues with a Jewel and a Lotus I pay homage.
To the One Thus-Gone, the Foe Destroyer, the Completely Perfected Fully Awakened Being, the King of Powerful Mount Meru who is Firmly Seated upon a Jewel and Lotus I pay homage.

These Endowed Transcendent Destroyer and the rest, in every sphere of the universe throughout the ten directions, the Ones Thus Gone, the Completely Perfected, Fully Awakened Beings, the Foe Destroyers, the Endowed Transcendent Destroyers, however many exist such as the Fully Awakened Beings who are alive and abide, I beseech them all to heed me.

In this birth and throughout births that have endlessly begun, in all places of birth while spinning through the cycle of existence I have done wrong deeds throughout every realm, have provoked them to be done, and have rejoiced at their being done. I have stolen the wealth from places of offering, the wealth from Those Intent on Virtue, and the wealth from those Intent on Virtue in the ten directions, or have provoked such a theft, or have rejoiced in the theft. I have committed the five unbounded heinous actions, have provoked their commitment or have rejoiced at their commitment. I have been involved in actually taking the path of the ten unwholesome actions, have commanded that it be entered, or have rejoiced at its being entered. Having been obscured by many obstacles from my previous actions, I shall be led into a realm of hell denizens, or shall be led to a place of birth as an animal, or shall be led to a land of the hungry spirits, or shall be born in a remote irreligious land, or shall be born among long-living celestial beings, or shall become incomplete in sensory organs, or shall come to hold wrong views, or I shall become displeased with the presence of a Fully Awakened Being. But now, before the Fully Awakened Beings, the Endowed Transcendent Destroyers who became primordially aware, who became visionary, who became witnesses, who became valid, who see by their knowledge, I acknowledge and lay bare whatever such obstacles from my previous actions I have, all of them, without concealing any, without keeping

anything secret, and hereafter I pledge to refrain from such actions.

All Fully Awakened Transcendent Destroyers please heed me. In this birth and throughout births that have endlessly begun in cyclic existence, in other births while proceeding in the cycle of existence; whatever source of virtue there is in my giving even a morsel of food to just one being who is born as an animal, and whatever source of virtue there is in my maintaining discipline, and whatever source of virtue there is in my abiding in pure conduct and whatever source of virtue there is in my acting to spiritually ripen sentient beings, and whatever source of virtue there is in activating my mind towards supreme full awakening, and whatever source of virtue there is in unsurpassable pristine awareness, having collected them, brought them together and bound them all fast through dedicating them completely to the unsurpassable, to that of which there is no higher, to that which is even higher than the high, to the supreme surmounting even the supreme, I fully dedicate for the peerless awakening of absolute perfection. Just as the Fully Awakened Transcendent Destroyers of the past have dedicated, and just as the Fully Awakened Transcendent Destroyers who are yet to come will dedicate, and just as the Fully Awakened Transcendent Destroyers living now are dedicating, in the same way do I make this dedication.

All wrongs individually I confess; in all merit I rejoice. All Fully Awakened Beings, I beseech and request you: may I and others realise the ultimate and supreme primordial awareness that is unsurpassable.

Whoever are the supreme men, the Conquerors living now,
Those of the past and likewise those who are yet to come,

Praising their excellences, all like a limitless ocean,
I join my palms in prayer, going close to them for refuge.

This completes The Exalted *Three Heaps,* a *sutra* of the Great Vehicle.

The Indian Commentary

Excerpts from Nagarjuna's Commentary to
Declaration of Downfalls of an Awakening (Warrior)

Sanskrit: Bodhipattidesanavrtti
Tibetan: Byang-chub ltung-ba bshags-pa'i 'grel-pa
(Translated from the Tibetan)

Homage to the superior, refined and glorious Manjusri
Homage to Śakyamuni, the Endowed Transcendent Destroyer[1]

Having paid homage to Gautama, who has gone to bliss, who keeps his mind free from conceptions, who understands everything non-conceptually and who, out of his great compassion, works for the sake of living beings, I shall explain from the scriptures and oral instructions the Declaration of Downfalls from Awakening, which cleanses the downfalls of an Awakening Warrior in order to benefit all sentient beings.

Śakyamuni, the Fully Awakened Being who understands everything, the Endowed Transcendent Destroyer, the Fully Awakened Being who possesses the Three Perfect Bodies[2] has taught many sacred Truths for the sake of all sentient beings. They all may be condensed into twelve scriptural categories[3] and from among them this teachings belong to the division of *sutra,* or discourses. When these twelve are condensed into the three baskets,[4] again the *Declaration of Downfalls* is included in the *sutra* basket, but strictly speaking it is included in the Great Vehicle practices of ethical restraint *('dul-ba, vinaya)* subsection of the *sutra* basket since it shows both the foundation and the attributes of the Great Vehicle.

It is said that the *Declaration of Downfalls* originated from an instance when thirty-five Awakening Warriors who were beginners[5] went begging and caused the death of a beer-seller's son. In order to lay this downfall bare they urged the Superior disciple Upali to request this *sutra* from Buddha, and thus the Endowed Transcendent Destroyer taught it.

If great evil, such as the unbounded[6] heinous actions, has been committed, then you should, without any break, apply the four forces of confession with extremely strong regret for months or years, touching five parts of your body (i.e. knees, hands and forehead) to the ground. By confessing in this way, the signs of purification will appear and you will have become cleansed. For intermediate sins you should perform six sessions a day for six months. Lastly, for lesser evil actions you should perform three sessions daily for seven days. For one who is uncertain whether a downfall has been committed, one should perform one session of the practice. This is how it is explained in the oral instructions.

Some people may think that this teaching is not a *sutra* because it does not begin with words such as "Thus have I heard...." This is not the case, because it is taught within the *Stack of Jewels Sutra (Ratnakutasutra),* specifically the *'Phags-pa dkon-mchog brtsegs-pa chos-kyi rnam-grangs strong-phrag brgya-par gleng gzhi.*

There are only thirty-five Fully Awakened Beings mentioned because it was intended for thirty-five actual disciples of Buddha, who had an intimate connection with the Buddha. It is not that you do not proceed in making obeisance to other Fully Awakened Beings.

Not all of the thirty-five Buddhas are referred to as the "One Thus-Gone," or *Tathagata.* This epithet is mentioned in only a few instances merely to act as a basis. In your

mind you should conceive of them all in the same way, knowing they all possess this quality. However, if you interpolate, you are altering the words of Buddha, for he taught it briefly worded.[7]

It is entitled the *Declaration of Downfalls of Awakening (Warriors)*. Warriors *(sem-dpa', sattva)* is added to *Awakening (byang-chub, bodhi)* since being courageous, like a warrior, is the cause of great awakening. Also if one has fallen from awakening it is called the *Downfall from Awakening.* Furthermore, this specifically refers to the downfalls of Awakening Warriors who are beginning and who abide in the practices of devotion(8). It does not refer to Awakening Warriors from the first spiritual level *(sa, bhumi)(9)* onwards.

Also, there are two forms of confession: ultimate and relative. The ultimate form of confession involves meditation on the lack of intrinsic existence of all phenomena. This is known as the greater confession. The relative confession is a combination of the four forces coupled with regret, prostrations and everything else, performed while cognisant of the illusory-like quality of phenomena. This is called the lesser confession.

When this sutra was first requested the Endowed Transcendent Destroyer radiated light rays which, for the sake of those Awakening Warriors, invoked the appearance of thirty-four Fully Awakened Beings from the ten directions, along with a multitude of others. They remained there in space while the penitent Awakening Warriors, after making offerings and generating the awakening mind, went for refuge. The disciples prostrated and laid bare their wrongs and by doing this only once were purified of all evil, and rose up to the first spiritual level as well as higher levels. You who live subsequent to this event should create a *mandala* and make offerings before images and paintings of these Fully Awakened Beings and then, having per-

formed practices such as activating the awakening mind in accordance with your spiritual master's instructions, you should make confession. By doing so, all wrongs will be cleansed and as a result you will attain the completely perfected, fully awakened state of being. Thus it is said that you should perform the practice in this way. The actual way of confession first involves declaring wrongs through the door of reliance. Prior to relying on recitation of the text from "I, who am called by the name..." onwards, make offerings to the thirty-five Awakened Beings and the rest, generate the two aspects of the awakening mind[10] and, while maintaining this awareness, go for refuge reciting, "I, who am called by the name..." and so on.

The Fully Awakened Beings[11] refers to the Teacher Buddha and the result, the three Perfect Bodies. "I go for refuge" means that you seek the highest protection in that fully awakened state. The Truth, or Dharma refers to the teachings as well as to the scriptures which are the cause, and the realisation or the ultimate state of being which is the result. The Spiritual Aspirants or Sangha, refers to the spiritual practitioners and those who follow the Buddha-dharma. It also refers to Awakening Warriors, Hearers and Solitary Realisers.[12] Here Awakening Warriors who are Spiritual Aspirants refers to those who cannot regress.[13]

Next is the laying bare of evil actions by means of the force of thorough application of counter-actions. This entails reciting the names of the "One Thus-Gone." Also, by prostrating to the thirty-five Awakened Ones, who are specifically associated with the actual declaration of wrongs, you will become purified of sins.

Before reaching that point, visualise the Fully Awakened Beings before you, manifested on lotuses and lunar thrones decorated with precious Jewels and supported by loins. They radiate as the Perfect Body of Emanations with the

thirty-two signs and the eighty exemplary marks.[14] You should visualise the colours of their bodies, their heavenly fields, directions, boundaries, robes and so forth; hand implements, their sitting in the adamantine position,[15] with many attendants, and seated in stages in the ten directions as will be described below. Then imagine that you have emanated many replicas of your own body and, reciting aloud, make prostrations with deep devotion. Otherwise, if your mind is to weak to do this visualization, imagine each with one face and two arms in postures such as teaching Dharma, going for alms, or touching the earth. Visualise them in whatever colours you prefer, such as white, and then make prostrations to them all with a devoted mind.

(1) The "One Thus-Gone" *(bde-bzhin-gshegs-pa, tathagata)* means that Buddha teaches Thusness *(bde-bzhin-nyid, tathata),* the true nature of reality, through the force of speech and that he has cognised it. He has gone to Thusness and is above all others.

The "Foe Destroyer" *(dgra-bcom-pa, arhat* or *ari-han)* means that Buddha has slain the foe of conflicting emotions and the obscurations to omniscience. This attainment makes him superior to an Awakening Warrior.

"Perfected" *(yang-dag-pa, samyak)* means that he will not lead you into wrong views. This quality makes him higher than a person in cyclic existence and a Low Vehicle follower. "Completely" *(rdzogs-pa, sampanna)* means that he has completed the" two accumulations (of insight and physical merit) and has attained the two Perfect Bodies: the Perfect Body of Truth for the sake of himself and the Perfect Body of Form for sake of others.[16] "Fully Awakened" *(sangs-rgyas, buddha)* signifies the two aspects of total accomplishment of having abandoned emotional afflictions and their traces, and of possessing insight into primordial

awareness. These two show that he is above all beings in both cyclic existence and the state Beyond Sorrow.[17]

The one who is characteristic of that fully awakened state is Śakyamuni, "the Subduer from the Śakya clan." The title Śakyamuni refers to his primordial awareness, ability and excellent qualities. *Sa* refers to his primordial awareness that understands all things without exception; *kya* refers to his insight, and *muni* means that he has bound himself to Truth without duality. "Subduer" *(thub-pa, muni)* carries the additional significance that he has overcome the detriment of having been born into an important position in the royal family of the Śakya. "Śakya" refers to his excellent quality of being above other beings. The special meaning of Subduer is that he has bound his body, speech and mind to Truth without duality. You should prostrate to him through the three gates of your body, speech and mind with sincere faith, imagining his body to be golden in colour and seated on the central throne in the posture of bestowing the Dharma.

(2) "The Great Destroyer with the Adamantine Essence" *(rdo-rje-snying-pos-rab-tu-'joms-pa, Vajrapramardi)* sits directly above Śakyamuni in the heavenly field of the 'essence of space.' He is blue in colour and in his hands he holds two adamantine sceptres *(rdo-rje, vajra)*. "Adamantine" means that his primordial or pristine awareness is non-conceptual; "Essence" signifies that his excellent qualities *(yon-tan, guna)* are the essential source of all things, and "Great Destroyer" indicates that his function *(las, karma)* is to destroy everything such as emotional afflictions.

(3) In the east, in front of Sakyamuni, sits "the Jewel Radiating Light" *(rin-chen 'od-'phro, Ratnarcis)* in the celestial field 'endowed with jewels.' He is white and holds a sceptre and a sun. Jewel indicates his excellent qualities are, like a precious jewel, the source of all excellence such as power;

his pristine awareness is clear like "Light" free from the darkness of not knowing reality; and "Radiating" refers to his function of eliminating the ignorance of every sentient being.

(4) "The Ruling King of Serpent Spirits" *(klu dbang-gi rgyal-po, Nagesvararaja)* is seated to the southeast of Sakyamuni in the heavenly field 'pervading the serpent spirits.' His body is blue in colour and he holds a tree of serpent spirits and a blue snake. "Serpent Spirits" refers to his primordial awareness which is cooling and is likened to a serpent or a malevolent spirit because, separated from conflicting emotions, it kills grasping at things as having characteristics. His function is "Ruling" because he has power over everything, and his excellence is like a "King('s)" because he is glorious among others, is handsome and lacks any fear.

(5) "The Leader of the Warriors" *(dpa'-bo'i-sde, Virasena)* is seated in the south in the heavenly field 'endowed with warriors.' He is yellow and holds in his hands a scripture and a sword. "Warrior" refers to his primordial awareness which is matchless and indefeatable; warrior also refers to his function of destroying all battles that arise in the cycle of existence, and "Leader"[18] refers to his excellent quality of being endowed with many accumulations of excellences.

(6) "The One Pleased to be a Warrior" *(dpa'-bo dgyes, Viranandi)*[19] is seated in the southwest in the heavenly field 'endowed with pleasure.' His body is orange in colour and he holds in his hands a sun and a red lotus. "Warrior" refers to his primordial awareness and functions as stated before, and "Pleased" refers to his excellence of mind which, because of its compassionate nature, is pleased to engage in activities for the benefit of sentient beings.

(7) "The Jewel Fire" *(rin-chen-me, Ratnagni)* is seated in the west in the heavenly field 'endowed with luminosity.'

He is red and holds a precious jewel and a ring of fire. "Jewel" refers to his primordial awareness which fulfils his purpose without discursive thought; it also refers to his excellence from which arises meditative absorption and total completeness *(phun-sum-tsogs-pa, sampanna)* which is beyond worldly actions; and "Fire" refers to his function of benefiting sentient beings with his primordial awareness and great energy which burns away their emotional afflictions.

(8) The "Jewel Moonlight" *(rin-chen zla-'od, Ratnacandraprabha)* sits in the north-west in the celestial field of 'good light.' His body is white in colour and he holds in his hands a jewel and a moon. "Jewel" refers to his excellence as before, "Moon" refers to his pristine awareness that is full, bright and cool; "Light" indicates his function to clear away contaminated actions and conflicting emotions, and that he illuminates the actual Truth of phenomena.

(9) In the north sits the "One With Vision and a Purpose" *(mthong-ba-don-yod, Amoghadarsi)* in the heavenly field of 'drum-beat.' He is green in colour and holds the two eyes of a fully awakened being. "Vision" indicates that his primordial awareness is unobscured; it also refers to his excellent quality that his eyes of intelligent awareness and compassion clearly see the Truth of reality itself *(chos-nyid, dharmatd)* and the purpose of sentient beings. His function is that he has a "Purpose" to lead all sentient beings to partake in the fruit of definite goodness and higher status.[20]

(10) "The Jewel Moon" *(rin-chen zla-ba, Ratnacandra)* is seated in the north-east in the celestial field 'abounding in radiant light.' He is pale-green in colour and he holds a precious jewel an a moon. "Jewel" refers to his excellent quality as noted before and "Moon" refers to his pristine awareness and function as stated before.

(11) "The Stainless One" *(dri-ma med-pa, Vimala)* is seated directly below Śakyamuni in the celestial realm 'covered by

ash particles.' His body is the colour of smoke and he holds two stainless mirrors. "Stainless" indicates his pristine awareness without obscurations; (that his function abides in) his ability to make others stainless, and that his excellent qualities, such as his power to brilliantly illuminate beings, distinguishes them from the traces of beings affected by unexpected occurrences.

That is the first group of ten Fully Awakened Beings around Buddha Sakyamuni to whom you should pay homage. The second group of ten is positioned directly above the first group.

(12) The One Thus-Gone who is "Bestower of Courage" *(dpa'-sbyin, Suradatta)* resides in the direction above Shakyamuni in the celestial field 'endowed with glory.' His body is white in colour and he holds a tree trunk with leaves and fruits. "Courage"[21] refers to his primordial awareness that puts an end to all discursive thoughts; it also refers to his excellence of unflinchingly giving total completeness and happiness to others; and "Bestower" indicates that his function is to bestow pleasure or whatever is wished for on all sentient beings of the three realms.[22]

(13) "The Pure One" *(tshang-pa, Brahma)* sits in the eastern direction in the heavenly field 'free from obscuration.' He is orange in colour and holds a lotus and a sun. His pristine awareness is "Pure" since it is free from all obscurations; also his function is to purify since he cleanses all sentient beings from cyclic existence; and furthermore his excellent qualities are pure because, through the strength of his immeasurable excellence, he cleanses both himself and others.

(14) "The One Who Gives out of Purity" *(tshang-pas-sbyin, Brahmadatta)* is seated in the south-east in the celestial field 'without sorrow.' He is yellow and holds a moon and a lotus. "Purity" refers to his pristine awareness and

excellence as noted before. His function is to "Give" all sentient beings pure happiness.

(15) "The Water Deity" *(chu-lha, Varuna)* sits encircled by water in the south in the 'stainless' celestial field. He is blue and is in the gesture of bestowing Dharma. "Water" refers to his pristine awareness which is extremely clear and unstained; it also refers to his function of compassionately moistening the mental continuum of sentient beings with the sacred Truth of Dharma; "Deity" indicates his marvellous quality of having magical powers by which he is able to conjure up emanations.

(16) "The Deity of the Water Deity" *(chu-lha'i-lha, Varunadeva)* is seated in the south-west and his body is white in colour. He holds the circle, or *mandate* of the Water Deity and a mirror. "Water" refers to his pristine awareness as noted before; "Deity" refers to his function which is to work for the sake of all sentient beings through performing tasks such as miraculous emanations; and also refers to his excellent quality as noted before.

(17) "The Glorious Good" *(dpal-bzang, Śribhadra)* is seated in the west in the heavenly field 'endowed with bliss.' He is red and holds a lotus and a twig from the wish-fulfilling tree. "Glorious" indicates his excellence of possessing complete perfection for the sake of himself and others; "Good" refers to his primordial awareness which is extremely supreme; and also to his function of leading others along the good path to the state Beyond Sorrow.

(18) "The Glorious Sandalwood" *(tsan-ldan-dpal, Candanasri)* sits in the north-western direction in the celestial field 'pervaded by a sweet perfume.' He is orange and holds the trunk of a sandalwood tree and a glorious fruit. "Sandalwood" refers to his primordial awareness since it cools and cleanses the pain of emotional afflictions such as ignorance; it also refers to his excellence since, (just as the scent of

sandalwood prevades a whole room), all things are likewise imbued with his supreme qualities such as his powers; and "Glorious" refers to his function as noted before.

(19) "The One of Unlimited Splendour" *(gzi-brjid-mtha'-yas, Anantatejas)* resides in the north in the celestial field 'endowed with splendour.' He is red in colour and holds two suns in his hands and is surrounded by a large retinue. "Splendour" refers to his pristine awareness which is clear and is able to suppress and bring others to clarity; "Limitless" indicates that his function is to benefit innumerable sentient beings and that his pre-eminent qualities are infinite.

(20) "The Glorious Light" *(od-dpal, Prabhasasri)* abides in the north-east in the heavenly field 'endowed with great significance.' His body is white in colour and he holds a ring of white light. "Light" refers to his pristine awareness which, like the sun, dispels the gloom of both the obscurations to liberation and omniscience of himself and others; "Glorious" refers to both his function and his excellent quality as noted before.

(21) "The Glorious One Without Sorrow" *(mya-ngan-med-pa'i-dpal, Asokasri)* is seated below the Stainless One in the celestial field 'separated from obscuration.' He is pale blue and holds an Asoka tree.[23] "Without sorrow" refers to his primordial awareness which has transcended cyclic existence and is separated from all obscurations; also it indicates his function of liberating all sentient beings from the sorrows of suffering and the cycle of existence; and "Glorious" refers to his excellence as noted before.

This concludes the second group of ten Fully Awakened Beings. Above them is the third group.

(22) Elevated above Śakyamuni in the celestial field 'separated from passion' sits "the Son of the Passionless One" *(srid-med-kyi-bu, Narayana)*. His body is blue and his

hands are in the gesture of Mount Meru and a lotus. "Passionless" refers to his primordial awareness which is divorced from discursive thought; and also to his function of freeing sentient beings from their attachment to cyclic existence; and "Son" indicates his excellent quality of being born like a son from the fully awakened state, and refers to his good qualities such as loving kindness.

(23) "The Glorious Flower" *(me-tog-dpal, Kusumasri)* resides in the eastern direction in the celestial field 'where many flowers blossom.' He is yellow and holds a yellow flower and a glorious fruit. "Flower" indicates that his excellent qualities are blossoming and beautiful and that his primordial awareness is like a flower because it is unfolding; and "Glorious" refers to his function of endowing everyone with complete perfection like himself.

(24) "The One Thus-Gone who Understands Clearly, Enjoying the Radiant Light of Purity" *(de-bzhin gshegs-pa tshang-pa'i 'od-zer rnam-par rol-pas mngon-par mkliyen-pa, Tathagatabrahamajyotivikriditabhijna)* sits in the south-east in the heavenly field 'pervaded by purity.' He is white and holds a lotus and a pool of light. The epithet "One Thus-Gone" is ascribed to this and the following fully Awakened Being, but it should be remembered that it applies equally to all thirty-five Awakened Ones.

"Purity" refers to his primordial awareness as noted before; "Radiant Light" refers to his excellence, his great ability that is extremely clear; "Enjoying" indicates his function of benefiting sentient beings through such feats as miraculous emanations; and through his primordial awareness of mind he clearly understands such things as the means for being of benefit.

(25) "The One Thus-gone who Understands Clearly, Enjoying the Radiant Light of the Lotus" *(de-bzhin gshegs-pa pad-ma'i 'od-zer rnam-par rol-pas mngon-par mkliyen-pa,*

Tathagatapadmajyotivikriditabhijna) sits in the south in the heavenly field 'endowed with lotuses.' He is red and his hands are in the gesture of a lotus and a sun. "Lotus" refers to his primordial awareness which blossoms and is not attracted to worldly faults; and "Clearly Understands, Enjoying the Radiant Light" refers to his function and good qualities as note before.

(26) "The Glorious Gem" *(nor-dpal, Dhanasri)* abides in the south-west in the heavenly field 'endowed with gems.' He is brilliant-red and holds his hands in the gesture of two jewels. "Gem" refers to his pristine awareness which is great and unceasing; it also indicates his function of fulfilling all desires by being endowed with great marvellous attributes like the qualities of a gem; and his excellence is indicated by "Glorious" which has two implications as noted before.

(27) "The Glorious One Who is Mindful" *(dran-pa'i-dpal, Smrtisri)* is seated in the western direction in the heavenly field 'endowed with clarity.' He is yellow and holds a text and a sword. "Mindful" indicates that his great primordial awareness never forgets; it also indicates his excellence which is his inconceivable ability to remember his previous life; and "Glorious" refers to his function as noted before.

(28) "The Glorious One Whose Name is Extremely Renowned" *(mtshan-dpal zhin-tu yongs-grags, Suparikirti-tanamaghepasri)* is seated in the north-west in the celestial field 'without any name.' He is green and with his two hands he holds the crown of a Buddha above his head. "Name" refers to his primordial awareness that cannot be expended; "Glorious refers to his function; and "Extremely Renowned" indicates his excellent quality is such that his great fame pervades throughout the three realms of the universe.

(29) "The King of the Victory Banner of the Pinnacle of Sensory Powers" *(dbang-po'i tog-gi rgyal-mtshan-gyi rgyal-po, Indraketudhvajaraja)* is seated in the north in the celestial field of 'clear sensory powers.' He is yellow and holds a victory banner and its precious pinnacle.[24] The "Pinnacle of Sensory Powers" refers to his primordial awareness because, just as we perceive objects through our sensory powers, he perceives the Truth of reality through his pristine awareness; and it is like a pinnacle since it beautifies reality; "Victory Banner" refers to his excellent quality of being victorious over cyclic existence; and "King" indicates that his function is to do all that is needed to be done.

(30) "The Glorious One Who Vanquishes Utterly Within" *(shin-tu rnam-par gnon-pa'i-dpal, Suvikranta)* is seated in the north-east in the heavenly field 'endowed with merriment.' He is white and sits in the earth-touching posture. "Perfectly" refers to his primordial awareness which is perfect; "Subdues" indicates that his function is to destroy the emotional afflictions and malevolent forces within all sentient beings; and "Glorious" refers to his excellences as noted before.

(31) Below the "Glorious One Without Sorrow" in the celestial field 'where there are no conflicting emotions,' sits the "One who is Utterly Victorious in Battles Within" *(gyul-las shin-tu rnam-par rgyal-ba, Yuddhajaya)*. He is black and holds a shield and a sward. "Victorious in Battles Within" indicates his function of turning back inner enemies which are the conflicting emotions and contaminated actions of all sentient beings; "Extremely" refers to his primordial awareness; and "Victorious" refers to his excellent quality of being endowed with the ability to gain victory over cyclic existence for the sake of himself and others.

This concludes the third group of Awakened Beings. Outside the immediately preceding circle of fully awakened beings are the remaining four.

(32) "The Glorious One who has Transcended by Vanquishing Within" *(rnam-par gnon-pa'i gshegs-pa'i-dpal, Vikrantagamsri)* is seated to the east of Sakyamuni in the heavenly field "endowed with glory." He is white and his hands are positioned in the earth-touching and the fearless gestures. "Vanquishing Within" refers to vanquish the inner enemies of conflicting emotions and contaminated actions; and "Glorious" refers to his excellence as noted before.

(33) "The Glorious One who Enhances and Illuminates Totally" *(kun-nas snang-ba bkod-pa'i-dpal, Samantavabha-savyuhasri)* is in the southern direction in the celestial field "where luminosity is enhanced." He is yellow and holds a sun and the stem of a precious jewel. "Illuminates Totally" refers to his function which is to eliminate the ignorance of sentient beings through his pristine awareness; "Enhances" indicates that his pristine awareness is limitless; and "glorious" refers to his excellence.

(34) In the western direction, in the heavenly field 'endowed with glory,' sits the "One who Subdues by a Jewel and a Lotus" *(rin-chen pad-ma'i rnam-par gnon-pa, Ratnapadmavikrami)*. He is red and holds a jewel and a lotus. "Jewel" refers to his excellences; "Lotus" indicates that his primordial awareness is stainless; and "Subdues" refers to his function as noted before.

(35) In the north, in the celestial field of 'precious jewels,' sits the "One Thus-Gone, the Foe Destroyer, the Completely Perfected Fully Awakened Being, the King of Powerful Mount Meru who is Firmly Seated upon a Jewel and a Lotus" *(de-bzhin gshegs-pa dgra-bcom-pa yang-dag-par rdzogs-pa'i sangs-rgyas rin-po-che-dang pad-ma-la rab-tu bzhugs-*

pa ri-dbang-gyi rgyal-po, Ratnapadmasupratisthitasailendraja). His throne consists of a lotus, moon, lions and precious jewels. He is sky-blue and his two hands support Mount Meru. You should understand that "Jewel" and "Lotus" refer to both his throne as well as to that of the others, indicating their excellences, function and primordial awareness. "Powerful Mount Meru" refers to his primordial awareness and excellent quality. His primordial awareness is unshakeable like the king of the mountains and his excellent quality is like Mount Meru. "King" indicates his function of doing what is needed to be done.

You should pay homage to these thirty-five Fully Awakened Beings through the three gates of your body, speech and mind. The Awakening Warriors who were mentioned previously did not actually commit any downfalls, but this prayer was intended for use by people in later times. Thinking that this prayer is particularly meant for you, you should make sincere confession.

(The commentary continues by stating that you should visualise the sky filled with Awakened Beings.)

"However many exist" indicates that space is filled beyond number with Ones Thus-Gone; "alive" indicates that with their eyes of compassion they protect sentient beings from fear; "abide" means that they will remain for as long as cyclic existence continues; the "Endowed Transcendent Destroyer" means that they have destroyed the four malevolent forces[25] and are endowed with good fortune; and from "in this birth" onwards indicates the time during which wrong actions have been done.

(The commentary continues briefly through the various categories of unwholesome actions as elaborated in the text.)

"Having been obscured by many obstacles of action," and so on, indicates that one realises the faults of these

wrong actions. Furthermore, by feeling uncomfortable at the thought that these seeds of unskilful actions will ripen in the way it is mentioned in this next section, your weary mind will seek to eliminate them and you will thereby make confession out of a sense of deep regret. This is the significance of mentioning the unwholesome actions and their possible consequences. Also, being obscured by those actions implies that your pristine awareness has been obstructed.

(The commentary follows by briefly outlining the unfortunate realms in which one may born, as detailed in the root text.)

The epithets "Fully Awakened Beings" and "Endowed Transcendent Destroyers" refers to Sakyamuni and the rest. They "became primordially" aware indicates that they understand everything; "became visionary" implies that they clearly discriminate between skilful and unskilful deeds; "became witnesses" indicates that they have impressed on their minds the distinctions between good and faulty actions; "became valid" means that words they have spoken are non-deceptive and without error; "see by their knowledge" means that by knowing everything of the mind, they see everything through eye of intelligent awareness.

I "acknowledge" implies that you mention your faults verbally; "lay them bare" means that you think of each of them; "without concealing" means that you promise to make your faults known; and "without keeping anything secret" means that you will actually keep none secret. If you lay bare your faults in these four ways you will become purified. This is the second force of confession.

Then comes confessing wrongs through the force of continually turning away from faults. This is done by vowing hereafter to refrain from these actions. In this way

you will become cleansed of evil; this is the third force of confession. Next is the thorough application of counter-measures, which in this case refers to calling upon the Fully Awakened Beings. Not allowing unskilful actions to proliferate again, and accumulating merit - which means that you rely on wholesome actions - should be understood to be like medicine.

Then follows the dedications and so forth, all of which contain the six transcending perfections *(pha-rol tu-phyin-pa, paramita)* of an Awakening Warrior. These six transcending perfections should be incorporated within your dedication, of which there are two types; (1) the dedication which is surpassable, including the first five perfections and (2) the dedication related to the transcending perfection of intelligent awareness.

"In this birth and others" refers to a good birth, which implies birth in any of the three realms (of desire, pure forms and formlessness) as a celestial being or in the desire realm as a human being. The practice of giving *(sbyin-pa, dana)* is indicated by the words "giving even," although you should understand that this includes giving things that are of greater value than this particular case. Even though the object of giving, an animal such as a dog, is lowly, you should take it as meaning a being of higher status. Also, though the actual thing given, a morsel, is small, you should understand that something larger is implied.

The practice of ethical discipline *(tshul-khrims, sila)* is indicated by "discipline" which implies; (1) vows, or bonds; (2) the bringing together of virtuous practices and (3) working for the sake of sentient beings. It is a source of virtue because it produces positive actions.

The practice of patience *(bzod-pa, ksanti)* is related to "abiding in pure conduct" which means parting yourself from wrongs and abiding in pure love and the like. This

implies following the practices of wholesome training *(dge-sbyong, sarmana)* such as (1) not returning harsh words; (2) not retaliating if someone beats you; (3) not speaking of the faults of others who speak of yours and (4) not returning anger. Patience does not necessarily mean being separated from desire and attachment.

The practice of enthusiastic energy *(brtson-'grus, virya)* is indicated by the words "acting to spiritually ripen sentient beings." Through enthusiastic energy and by means of the five heightened awareness *(mngon-shes, abhijnana),* you turn all sentient beings from the wrong view and path. Also by engaging in the practice of wholesome deeds, you ripen your own mind-stream. You should also understand that enthusiastic energy indicates the means for gaining release from cyclic existence and for reaching the limit of Buddhahood.

The practice of meditative stability, or concentration *(bsam-gtan, dhyand)* is included in "activating my mind towards full awakening" which implies both the relative awakening mind, the aspiration for and venturing into the awakened state of being, and the ultimate awakening mind, meditation on emptiness. Abiding single-pointedly in this awakening mind is associated with meditative stability.

"Unsurpassable pristine awareness," incorporated within the dedication along with the transcendent perfection of intelligent awareness *(shes-rab, prajna),* means there is nothing which is higher. This indicates the realisation of the actual Truth of non-duality brought about by the accumulation of primordial awareness. In regard to the six perfections, the first four involve the accumulation of physical merit; the sixth, the accumulation of primordial awareness; while the fifth applies to both. Thus all six perfections are included within these two accumulations.

(These accumulations of merit are all brought together and dedicated to) the "unsurpassable" which is the fully awakened state of being that is superior to the Hearers' attainment; "that of which there is no higher" means an Awakened Being; the "high" is from the point of view of worldly beings; the Awakening Warriors are even "higher than" them; the Fully Awakened Being, of whom there is no higher, is supreme over even the supreme Awakening Warriors. Furthermore, a Fully Awakened Being, himself is the greatest Awakening Warrior since he understands everything. I "fully dedicate" implies that your dedication is made with complete purity of the three circles - the object of dedication, the act and the actor - not apprehending them as having inherent existence. The above is the ordinary form of dedication of an Awakening Warrior. The unsurpassable form of dedication employed by a Fully Awakened Being is the most skilful method of dedication. Just as they, the Fully Awakened Beings, dedicate, so should you in the same way make your dedication even though you do not fully understand such dedication.

The Three Heaps *(phung-po gsum, triskandha)* are contained in this dedication. "All wrongs individually I confess" is the heap of confessing wrongs. Rejoicing in the merits of both ordinary beings, who are impure, and Superior Beings or Āryas, who are pure, making them the object of your rejoicing is the heap of joy. Beseeching the Fully Awakened Beings not to (die and) pass into the state Beyond Sorrow, and requesting them to continually turn the wheel of the doctrine is the heap of making request. Through these Three Heaps you accumulate immeasurable amounts of merit.

Then incidentally, you generate an aspiration for the path *(smon-lam, pranidhana),* aspiring to attain the fully awakened state of being, by reciting "may I attain the

ultimate and supreme pristine awareness that is unsurpassable."

The supreme opponent for all evil is going for refuge and here again you seek refuge in "the supreme men, the Conquerors" and the rest. Previously refuge was explained by making use of the ordinary objects of refuge - Buddha, Dharma and Sangha - but the ultimate refuge, as here, is just the Fully Awakened Being, which is why the other two are not included here. Supreme men means the Perfect Body of Emanations, or Nirmanakaya, taking birth as men; "excellences" implies, such things as the powers of a Fully Awakened Being. Physically you join your palms in prayer and then go for refuge.

In this way, by applying the four forces, you will become cleansed of neuroses and, completing your accumulations, will attain the fully awakened state.

To Gautama who clarifies all views,
Who teaches in a perfect way
Who, like lion, has destroyed
All malevolent forces, I pay homage.

COLOPHON

The *Commentary to the Declaration of Downfalls of an Awakening (Warrior,* composed by the great master, the superior Nagarjuna, is complete. This has been translated, checked and settled (from Sanskrit into Tibetan) by the Indian Bodhisattva Abbot Santarakṣita and the Tibetan translator Devaghosa.

This commentary has been translated from the Narthang edition of the Tan-gyur *(bstan-'gyur), sutra* section, volume *ji* fol. 209b to 220b in the collection of His Holiness the Dalai Lama at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.

Notes and References

1. The etymological derivation of the epithet "Endowed Transcendent Destroyer" *(bcom-ldan-'das, bhagavan)* according to the *Composition in Two Sections (sgra-sbyor bam-po gnyis-pa)* in the *Tibeto-Sanskrit Lexicographical Materials* edited by Sonam Angdu, New Delhi, 1973, p.8 is as follows:

   > *Bhag* has two meanings: "destroyed" *(bcom)* and "six goodness" *(legs-pa drug); van* means "endowed with" *(ldan).* A Bhagavan has destroyed the four malevolent forces *(bdud, mara)* of emotional afflictions, the psycho-physical constituents, the sons of the gods and the lord of death. He is endowed with the six good qualities of form *(gzugs),* fame *(grags-pa),* power *(dbang-phyug),* glory *(dpal),* intelligent awareness *(shes-rab)* and energy *(brtson-pa).*

   In order to distinguish this epithet of Buddha from that of worldly spiritual beings the Tibetan translations added *'das,* meaning one who is 'transcendent' or beyond the world. For worldly spiritual beings they translated *Bhagavan* as *legs-ldan* or 'one endowed with good qualities,' which is how the term was defined by the non-Buddhists themselves.
2. The Three Perfect Bodies are: (i) the Perfect Body of Truth *(chos-kyi sku, dharmakaya)* the omniscient mind of a Fully Awakened Being; (ii) the Perfect Body of Complete Enjoyment *(longs-spyod rdzogs-pa'i sku, sambhogakaya)* which according to the general interpretation means the form of a Fully Awakened Being that is (a) only perceived by beings of pure vision, (b) always resides in Buddha-fields, (c) is always fully adorned with all (major and minor) characteristics, (d) always lives until the end of cyclic existence, (e) always teaches the Great Vehicle path and (f) this to a circle of Superior Awakening Warriors only; and (iii) the Perfect Body of Emanations *(sprul-pa'i sku, nirmanakaya),* the person in which an Awakened Being appears in the world.

3. The twelve scriptural categories are: (1) sutra(s) present the discourses of Buddha in a brief format; (2) *geya(s)* are verses which Buddha uttered during the course of and at the conclusion of his sutras; (3) *vyakarana(s)* are Buddha's revelations of what has happened in the past or prophesies of what will occur in the future; (4) *gatha(s)* are two to six-lined verses; (5) *udana(s)* are praises that Buddha uttered in joy for the sake of the long life of his teachings; (6) *niddana(s)* are rules, codified by Buddha for those who are ordained, concerning which actions constitute a breach of their vows; (7) *avadana(s)* are teachings given by the use of examples; (8) *itivrttika(s)* are stories Buddha told from ancient times; (9) *jataka(s)* are accounts of the difficult ascetic practices Buddha performed in his previous lives while engaging in the conduct of an Awakening Warrior; (10) *vaipulya(s)* are presentations of the vast and profound aspects of such topics as the six transcending perfections and the ten spiritual levels; (11) *abhutadharma(s)* are descriptions of such marvellous things as the wisdom, extra-physical powers and saintly deeds of the Buddha, Solitary Realisers and Hearers; and (12) *upadesa(s)* indicate precisely the meaning of the works in the "Basket of Sutras" by specifying the individual and general definition of things.
4. The Three Baskets *(sde-snod-gsum, tripitaka)* are: (1) the basket of discourses or *sutra* containing scriptures mainly dealing with the subject of the training in higher concentration, (2) the basket of higher truths, or *abhidharma* dealing mainly with the training in higher intelligent awareness and (3) the basket of moral restraint, or *vinaya* dealing mainly with the training in higher discipline.
5. Awakening Warriors who are beginners are those who have not yet gained insight into emptiness and abide in either of the first two spiritual paths of accumulation and application. For a description of the five spiritual paths cf. sGam-po-pa, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation,* translated by H.V. Guenther, Shambhala, Berkeley, 1971, pp. 232-38.

6. Unbounded actions *(mtshams-med-las)* according to the late Apho Rinpoche, a yogi of Milarepa's lineage, means "the most non-virtuous of actions. At the time of death and after-death processes, a being who has committed actions of a non-heinous nature experiences the clear light, the *bardo* or intermediate stage, the existence intermediate stage and then rebirth. A being who has committed any of the unbounded heinous actions experiences at death none of these processes but takes direct rebirth in hell. Therefore there is no boundary." The five major unbounded actions are elaborated in the Tibetan commentary p. 72.
7. In many of the large monasteries in Tibet the title *bde-zhin gshegs-pa,* or *Tathagata* was added to the names of the thirty-five Buddhas. Although such a title cannot be added to the actual written texts of Buddha (i.e. *bka'-'gyur),* it may be added, in practice in order to inspire faith.
8. The practices of devotion are on the first two spiritual paths.
9. There are ten spiritual levels extending from a practitioner's initial direct insight into emptiness on the 'path of seeing' up to the final attainment of complete awakening. Thus these levels cover the last three of the five 'paths'; the paths of seeing, meditation and no more learning. Cf. sgam-po-pa, *Jewel Ornament of Liberation,* Chap. 19, "The Spiritual Levels", pp. 239-56.
10. The two aspects of the awakening mind are the relative aspect, which is both the aspiration for full awakening and the venturing into the practices for its achievement, and the ultimate aspect which is meditation on emptiness.
11. It seems that the original Sanskrit version of the *Declaration of Downfalls* did not contain the homage to the spiritual master. This was no doubt added because of the strong influence from *tantric* practices in which the spiritual master is considered the embodiment of the Three Supreme Jewels.
12. Hearers *(nyan-thos, sravaka)* and Solitary Realisers *(rang-sangs-rgyas, pratyekabuddha)* are both Lesser Vehicle followers who lack the all-encompassing compassion of the Awakening

Warrior and mainly strive for liberation for themselves alone, believing this to be the ultimate attainment. Cf. sGam-po-pa, op-cit, p. 4. It should be noted that there can be many such practitioners actually following the tenets of the Great Vehicle, just as there can be Awakening Warriors following Lesser Vehicle practices.

13. Those who do not regress are those who have attained the path of seeing the true nature of reality.
14. Nagarjuna, in the *Precious Garland,* George Alien & Unwin Ltd., London, 1975, enumerates these thirty-two signs in the traditional manner, pp. 43-46.
15. The adamantine position is with the legs crossed and the feet resting on the opposite thighs or calves. The lotus position actually refers to a position of the consort in *tantric* practices.
16. The Perfect Body of Truth, or *Dharmakaya,* can be further divided into the Perfect Body of Truth of Pristine Awareness *(ye-shes chos-sku, jnanadharmakaya)* which is the mind of fully awakened being that understands everything and the Perfect Body of Universal Essence *(ngo-bo-nyid sku, svabhavikakaya)* which is the ultimate nature of emptiness of that mind. The Perfect Body of Form *(gzugs-kyi sku, rupakaya)* is divided into the Perfect Body of Enjoyment and the Perfect Body of Emanations. See note 2.
17. *Nirvana* or the state "Beyond Sorrow" *(mya-ngan-las 'das-pa)* either can refer to emptiness, known as the natural *nirvana,* or to the state to be attained. With regard to the latter, in the Great Vehicle it is identical to the fully awakened state, whereas in the Lesser Vehicle it refers to merely liberation *(thar-pa, moksa)* from cyclic existence. This last interpretation is the general connotation of the term. See "What is Nirvana?" by L.T. Doboom Tulku, *The Tibet Journal,* Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 87-93.
18. The term for *leader (sde, sena)* in Sanskrit and Tibetan means a collection of things, hence the explanation in the commentary.

19. According to the commentary his name is warrior *(dpa'-po)* and not glorious *(dpal)* as is found in many Tibetan versions.
20. "Definite goodness" refers to Buddhahood and the state of liberation from cyclic existence, and "higher status" refers to birth in one of the three higher realms of humans, demi-gods and gods.
21. Again it should read *dpa'* and not *dpal* as is found in many Tibetan versions.
22. The three realms are the realms of desire, form and formlessness.
23. It is said in Indian poetry that the flower of the Asoka tree cannot blossom by the light of the sun or moon, but will only do so if a virgin touches it with her anklet.
24. Pinnacle refers to the topmost ornament adorning banners and flags.
25. The four malevolent forces *(bdud, mara)* are those of (i) emotional and psychological afflictions, (ii) the five psycho-physical constituents, which are maintained by the force of contaminated actions and emotional afflictions, (iii) the sons of gods, which means being attached to the pleasurable enticements of meditative absorption and (iv) the lord of death, who interrupts one's progression in the practice because one then has to be reborn favorably to continue. H.V. Guenther in the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* states that "Mara implies a deadening influence on life." Note 1, p. 199.
26. H.V. Guenther, op. cit, p. 52, states that the five heightened awarenesses are:

    > (i) miraculous powers such as multiplying oneself, walking through walls and so on; (ii) hearing human and divine voices near and far; (iii) knowing other's thoughts; (iv) recollection of former lives; and (v) the vision of beings passing away and then reincarnating.

The Tibetan Commentary

An Explanation of the Practice of *The Sutra of Three Heaps*

by Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey
and Thupten Zopa Rinpoche
(Based upon the Tibetan Oral Transmission)

INTRODUCTION

The foundation of spiritual realisation is the maintenance of pure ethical discipline, not committing any unwholesome action or transgressing any of the three types of vows. These vows are: (i) of individual liberation *(so-sor thar-pa, pratimoksa)* including those of laymen and monks; (ii) the bonds of commitments of an Awakening Warrior; and (iii) the *tantric* pledges of those actively following the *tantra.* The way to keep them pure while reducing or eliminating the strength of instincts of previous unwholesome actions, is repeatedly to lay bare one's transgressions and to curtail the tendency to repeat them.

The principal characteristic of confession is reflected in the literal meaning of its Tibetan equivalent *shag-pa (bshags-pa),* which means 'splitting open,' 'laying bare,' or 'declaring.' For example, wilfully killing a being, even a small insect, is a transgression of fundamental Buddhist tenet not to kill. Keeping this act secret rather than exposing it would make the eradication of its possible detrimental effects more difficult. Opening up and exposing our faults is the meaning of confession. Openness and honesty in every situation is the essence of the Buddhist path.

It is characteristic of water to flow downwards and of fire to burn upwards. Similarly, worldly beings are imbued

with emotional and psychological afflictions such as greed, aggression and ignorance which naturally lead them into conflict and bewilderment thus increasing their misery. The principal source of suffering and confusion stems from the mind and one's out look on life. If harmful mental factors are reduced, peace of mind and harmony will arise. Water will never flow upwards nor will fire burn downwards. The arisal of mental afflictions can be stopped through confession and repeated application of the four forces opposing previous, present and future detrimental deeds.

The first force is that of reliance, which means entrusting oneself to a faultless object of refuge. The second is the force of counter-measures involving thorough application of antidotes counteracting the wrongs done. This is not merely blind penance, but depends on understanding the law of cause and effect. The third force is repentance, generating a strong feeling of remorse and regret at having done harmful deeds. And the fourth force is a strong intention to turn away from committing such acts again.

Understanding the value of confession depends on an understanding of the law of cause and effect. Basically this means realising that skilful actions lead to pleasure and happiness while unskilful ones to frustration and suffering. Furthermore, since all beings are alike in wishing to avoid misery and to gain happiness, we must live in accordance with the law of cause and effect in order to achieve this universally shared aim. This is the main teaching of the Fully Awakened Being, Buddha 6akyamuni. All higher insights depend on this foundation.

Unless we realise and believe that the consequences of neurotic actions will be suffering, discomfort, and confusion, it will never be possible for us to generate a real sense of regret, and this genuine feeling of remorse is the most important of the four forces because it naturally leads to the

other three. Although we may regret many things, we rarely regret the wrongs we have done. This shows that we are too short-sighted. We feel that we must witness or experience the effect of our actions committed in this life. However, most of the consequences of actions committed in this life, especially of serious non-virtues, are not experienced in the same lifetime but ripen as intense misery in future lives. Therefore, not experiencing pain immediately after committing a non-virtuous act does not disprove the law of cause and effect. If we accept that an oak-tree certainly grows from an acorn, why not accept that misery results from non-virtue and happiness arises from virtue? Real awareness of day-to-day activities reveals that acting on inclination towards greed, anger and so on results in dissatisfaction both for ourselves and others.

One of the most powerful opponents to past adverse instincts is confession, and of the various means of confession the most potent is the practice of the *Sutra of Three Heaps.* The great Being Santideva in the *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life (Bodhisattvacaryavatara)* says,

> Be certain to perform the Three Heaps
> Three times in the day and in the night.
> Having stabilised (your mind before) the Conqueror
> and Awakening Warriors,
> By that (practice) pacify your remaining downfalls.[1]

The first of the "Three Heaps" is the heap of confession, the second, dedication, and the third, rejoicing.[2] They are called heaps *(phung-po, skandha)* because a heap arises from many things, such as grains or stones, being gathered together. Here, heap implies that this practice is a synthesis of various methods of confession, dedication and rejoicing. It includes a recitation of the names of thirty-five fully Awakened Beings, mentioned because they have taken specific oaths

and pledges to destroy defilements and obstacles that exist in the minds of living beings. The venerable Je Tsong Khapa, founder of the Gelug tradition, his Nying-ma teacher, Lho-dr'ag Drub-ch'en Lä-kyi dor-je and the translator Mar-pa, founder of the Kargyii tradition, performed their preliminary practices in connection with the *sutra.* It is said that Je Tsong Khapa did 100,000 prostrations to each of the thirty-five Awakened Beings. Whether intensely followed as part of the preliminary practices or as a daily recitation, if this practice is done with sincerity and a strong conviction in the law of cause and effect, it will definitely lead to meditational insight and increased happiness in daily life.

APPLYING THE FOUR FORCES

Religion in the Spiritual Master and the Three Supreme Jewels, the first opponent force, is explicitly expressed at the beginning of the *sutra,* but the generation of the awakening mind is not so obvious. It is, however, implicitly indicated at the end of the text, where merit is dedicated to the peerless awakening of absolute perfection, so that we may attain the ultimate supreme primordial awareness that is unsurpassable. This shows the nature of the awakening mind which, in order to benefit others, both aspires to and actively engages in those actions leading to the fully awakened state.

The second opponent force is application of special virtuous actions to overcome the obstacles of evil and emotional afflictions. There are six ways in which this can be done. The first is repetition of mystic formulae *(sngags, mantra)*[3] or the names of the thirty-five Buddhas to whom homage is paid. The other five special virtuous actions are: (i) meditating on Vajrasattva and reciting his one hundred syllable *mantra;* (ii) reading texts dealing with the profound subject of emptiness, especially the *Prajnaparamita Sutras;* (iii)

actually meditating on emptiness, the most powerful opponent force of all; (iv) presenting offerings; and (v) making statues or paintings, or building reliquary monuments *(mchod-rten, stupa).*

The third opponent force is repentance or remorse. This is the most crucial among the four forces. Having requested the Fully Awakened Beings to grant their attention, we review the possible categories of unwholesome actions that we have done and may still be doing. By contemplating deeply on the meaning of the text, great regret and a feeling of repentance should arise.

The fourth opponent force is the promise to turn away from doing such actions again. "Without concealing them" implies that immediately after committing a wrong action, we lay it bare rather than conceal it for even a short time. "Without keeping anything secret" means that we shall not continue to hide our wrong-doings, nor shall increase them. The phrase, "Hereafter I pledge to refrain from these actions again" is the essence of this force. This pledge does not constitute a formal vow but rather an intention to avoid any similar unskilful actions in the future. Nevertheless, confession does have the power to maintain the purity of formal vows.

In addition to these four forces, there is the force of dedication. This is the second of the three heaps, and its importance is difficult for ordinary beings to imagine. In general, there are three types of dedication of merit, each having its respective objective. The first objective is for the attainment of Full Awakening, the second is for the preservation of the sacred Doctrine and the third is for the securing of the care and guidance of spiritual masters throughout all our future lives. In this text, dedication is of the first kind, confirming our application of the four forces. Any 'method of accomplishmenf *(sgrub-thabs, Sadhana)* should

conclude with the dedication of merits that may have accrued during the practice. If this is done with aspirations for the path,[4] the practice becomes solid and well-founded.

THE THIRTY-FIVE AWAKENED BEINGS

The standard way to confess by means of this *sutra* entails repeating the names of thirty-five Fully Awakened Beings. Each has specific powers to eliminate various obstacles from residual wrong actions committed over many aeons. To make this clearer, an explanation of the Buddhist concept of time is needed.

The largest unit of time in Buddhist cosmology is a Great Aeon which is divided into eighty inter-aeons. These eighty are classified into the four Great Events of the universe, with each Event lasting twenty inter-aeons. The first twenty inter-aeons are known as the inter-aeons of formation during which the universe is being re-created after its previous destruction. The second twenty are characterised by the prevalence of sentient life; the third twenty are the inter-aeons of destruction; and the fourth are empty inter-aeons during which there is nothing at all.

The duration of the twenty inter-aeons of each universal event is calculated in terms of the increasing and decreasing human life-spans of the second event. At the outset of the second Great Event of Abiding the human life-span is eighty thousand years. Each two hundred years this life-span decreases by one year until the average person dies at the age of ten. The duration of time required for this decrease constitutes the first inter-aeon of the twenty inter-aeons and is called the 'era of the great downwards reduction of life span.' Following this first inter-aeon, the life span increases

Following this first inter-aeon, the life span increases
from ten back to eighty thousand years at the rate of one

year every hundred and then again descends or 'curves' downwards to begin the next era of decrease back to ten years at the same rate. Each increase or decrease in life span is called a 'curve of time,' and is repeated, alternately increasing and decreasing eighteen times. The last of the twenty inter-aeons is the 'era of the great upward increase of life span' during which the average length of the human life again increases from ten to eighty thousand years at the same rate as it so decreased during the first inter-aeon. Each Great Event is measured in the same way.

Although the main events of a great aeon are formation, abiding, destruction and emptiness, other lesser events characterise the present cycle of time such as the eras of famine and weapons. When the life span dwindles to thirty years, a time of famine will occur and everyone will die of starvation. When it has dwindled to ten years, whatever implements are held will become weapons and everyone will hate and kill one another.

Further details about Buddhist cosmology can be found in the *Abhidharma* texts and commentaries, such as the *Treasury of Higher Truths* by Vasubandhu and the *Compendium of Higher Truths*[6] by his brother Asanga. Understanding the enormous duration of aeons should make us extremely grateful that the consequences of unwholesome deeds committed over such expanses of time can be eliminated.

Reciting the epithets of the first of the thirty-five Buddhas, the Fully Awakened Being of the present world-age, eliminates the ripening of effects of wrongs done over ten thousand great aeons. The epithets ascribed to him are etymologised in the following way. He is "Teacher" because he teaches the sacred Dharma. It is said that the Teacher is unequalled, that he alone has spoken the word, and that what he has said is definitive. He is the "Endowed Transcendent Destroyer" since he destroys all emotional defile-

ments and the two obscurations, one to liberation and the other to omniscience, and possesses every excellence of insight and compassion. He has transcended existence and abides in the ultimate reality. He is the "One Thus-gone" because he has gone beyond the misery of cyclic existence having reached Full Awakening and thus has abandoned all psychological afflictions along with their instincts. It also implies he has attained the understanding of Thusness. He is the "Foe Destroyer" because he has overcome the foe of conflicting emotions. This indicates that Full Awakening is attained by destroying internal, not external enemies. The Sanskrit word *arhat* also connotes one who is worthy of offering. He is the "Completely Perfected Fully Awakened Being" because he has completed his accumulation of excellent qualities and maintains perfect, non-erroneous recollection of the essence of all phenomena. He has awoken from the sleep of ignorance and, like a blossoming lotus, has fully spread his intellect to all that is knowable. He is "Glorious"[7] because he has passed beyond the godly realms and has reached the definite goodness of release from cyclic existence. He is the "Conqueror"[8] because he has overcome all mental obstacles. He is the "Subduer" since he has subdued all types of reality and is completely in control and capable. He is a descendent of the ancient Indian warrior clan, the *Śakyas*. These are the titles by which he is known.

The other thirty-four Fully Awakened Beings eliminate the traces of evil either accumulated over varying specific lengths of time or from specific non-virtuous actions. The "Great Destroyer with the Adamantine Essence" eliminates non-virtue committed over a period of ten thousand great aeons; the "Jewel Radiating Light," over a period of twenty thousand great aeons; the "Ruling King of the Serpent Spirits" eliminates those committed over one thousand great

aeons; the "Leader of the Warriors" also for one thousand; the "One who is Pleased to be a Warrior" for two thousand aeons; the "Jewel Fire" also for two thousand aeons; the "Jewel Moonlight" for eight thousand aeons; the "One with Vision and a Purpose" eliminates wrongs done over one aeon and the "Jewel Moon" specifically eliminates the imprints of the five unbounded heinous actions. The "Stainless One" eradicates the latent traces of the five lesser unbounded actions; the "Bestower of Courage" eliminates those of anger, the "Pure One" eliminates those arising from the attachment of ten thousand aeons; and the "One who Gives out of Purity" eliminates those of the general non-virtues of ten thousand aeons. The "Water Deity" eliminates imprints of the sins of one thousand aeons and both the "God of the Water Deity" and the "Glorious Good" eradicate those of five thousand aeons. The "Glorious Sandalwood" does away with the traces of wrongs done for seven thousand aeons as does the "One of Unlimited Splendour." The "Glorious Light" can eliminate the stains of previous evil actions of unlimited time. The "Glorious One Without Sorrow" eliminates the potencies of actions done out of ignorance; and the "Son of the Passionless One" those done out of the instincts of ignorance. The "Glorious Flower" eliminates the latent traces of all bodily non-virtues, the "One who Understands Clearly, Enjoying the Radiant Light of Purity" eliminates those of speech and the "One who Understands Clearly, Enjoying the Radiant Light of the Lotus" eliminates those of mind. The "Glorious Gem" eliminates the imprint arising from the non-virtue of stealing from monasteries, the "Glorious One who is Mindful" eliminates those arising from despising others or abusing them and the "Glorious One whose Name is Extremely Renowned" eliminates those arising from jealousy. The "King of the Victory Banner of the Pinnacle

of Sensory Powers" eliminates those arising from arrogance and conceit, the "Glorious One who Vanquishes Utterly Within" eliminates those arising out of slander and the "One who is Utterly Victorious in Battles Within" eradicates those arising out of all types of non-virtuous actions. The "Glorious One who has Transcended by Vanquishing Within" eliminates the stain of encouraging others to act improperly and the "Glorious One who Enhances and Illuminates Totally" eliminates those of rejoicing in unwholesome deeds. The "One who Subdues by a Jewel and a Lotus" eliminates the imprints of all forms of abandoning spirituality and finally, the "King of Powerful Mount Meru who is Firmly Seated upon a Jewel and a Lotus" eradicates the stains arising from disparaging your Spiritual Master.

In many Tibetan editions of this *sutra* the words, the "One Thus-Gone" are prefixed before all the names of the thirty-five Buddhas. This title was added by Je Tsong Khapa after experiencing a vision of the thirty-five Buddhas, each without a head. Upon showing increased respect by adding *de-bzhin gshegs-pa,* their heads appeared.

The advantages of repeating these thirty-five names or just remembering them once, were spoken of by the Buddha Śakyamuni. Such benefits derive from the pledge to help sentient beings in these specific ways that these Awakened Beings have made in their previous lives, not from the mere repetition of their names. Remembering their abilities constitutes the application of antidotes that counteract wrongs. When united with the other three forces, the latent traces of non-virtue will certainly be eliminated.

VISUALISATION AND PRACTICE

The visualisation of the assembly of the thirty-five Awakened Ones may be done in various ways. Two

methods for positioning them around the central figure of the Buddha Sakyamuni are presented below. Individual practitioners should follow which ever method suits them or according to the instructions of their personal teachers. The first was explained by Thupten Zopa Rinpoche, the second by Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey.

Thupten Zopa Rinpoche's Explanation

Visualise in front of and slightly above yourself the central figure, Buddha Sakyamuni. He is seated on an elephant-supported, pearl-white throne, his legs crossed in the adamantine posture, wearing the robes of a monk, his right hand is touching the earth while his left is in his lap holding a bowl brimming with the nectar of wisdom. From his heart thirty-four light rays emanate, ten upwards, ten downwards, and seven to either side. At the end of each ray is a throne of precious pearl supported by an elephant. The white pearl symbolises complete purification of negative actions. The elephant, the strongest of animals, symbolises strong purification of negativities.

Each Buddha shows a different hand gesture. Radiant light-nectar shines from these holy ones purifying your body, speech and mind of all non-virtues and their imprints. Thus the "three doors" are cleansed of negative traces, just as darkness disperses when light appears. Having visualised in this way for some time, prostrate three times while repeating the following *mantra:*

OṂ NAMO MANJUSRJYE
NAMO SUSRIYE/
NAMO UTTAMASRIYE SVAHA/

This will increase the benefit of prostrating. Next, begin reciting the *sutra* while continuing to prostrate. If at first it

is difficult to remember the entire prayer, read it through once and then commence prostrating while repeating only the thirty-five names. Upon completion, recite the entire prayer once again.

This method of eradicating negativities is especially beneficial if done early in the morning and just before going to sleep at night. It is one of the most effective means of making this life fruitful. You will quickly achieve realization, while eliminating the necessity of experiencing adverse results from previous contaminated actions. Therefore it is of much more value than a world filled with precious gems and gold.

Geshe Ngawang Dhargey's Explanation

From a relaxed but controlled meditative state of imaginative stability visualise Buddha Śakyamuni in front of yourself. He is seated on a throne slightly larger than those surrounding him. The thrones are covered in elephant skin, signifying the great strength needed to destroy non-virtuous actions. In each cardinal direction around Buddha Śakyamuni are seven Awakened Beings and also three above him and three below him. Each group is coloured according to the symbolism of the five Conquerors, or "Dhyani" Buddhas. In the east, in front of the central figure, all Awakened Beings are white, like Vairocana. Behind, in the west, all are red like Amitabha. In the north, to his left, all are green like Amoghasiddhi and in the south, to his right, all are yellow, like Ratnasambhava. Those above and below are golden like the central figure himself. You should visualise them all as being pleased with you and smiling compassionately. In the ten directions Buddhas and Bodhisattvas surround this assembly. To prostrate, fold your hands as if you were holding a precious gem to your

heart, thumbs tucked in. Touch them in turn to the crown of your head, to your forehead, throat, and heart. Then bend down, touch the ground with hands and knees, keeping the hands open but with the fingers not spread. You may now either do a half prostration by touching the forehead to the ground or extend your body in full prostration. Do not rest on the ground but rise quickly, indicating your firm intention to attain the ultimate state soon.

Having thus recited the names of the thirty-five Buddhas, you now request their attention. Then recite the many unskilful actions you have committed in this and previous lifetimes, including such actions as instigating or rejoicing in the unwholesome deeds of others.

The first such action mentioned is stealing wealth from places of offering *(mchod-rten, stupa).* The *stupa* represents one aspect of the first object of refuge, a Buddha's Perfect Body of Truth, the *Dharmakaya.* Since the Perfect Body of Truth, the all-knowing awareness of a Buddha, cannot be perceived by ordinary beings, it is symbolically represented in the physical form of a *stupa.* The other aspect the Perfect Body of Emanations, or the form in which a Buddha appears the *Nirmanakaya* is usually represented by statues or paintings. Therefore, if any offering made to a *stupa* is stolen, or if even a scarf draped over a statue is taken, such a theft constitutes a non-virtue of this type. An example would be the local children at Bodh Gaya stealing the offering candles. The action, according to the law of *karma,* only serves to perpetuate their poverty.

Next is stealing the wealth from Those Intent on Virtue, the *sangha.* This means stealing from anyone who belongs to the monastic community. The text mentions, "stealing the wealth from Those Intent on Virtue throughout the ten directions," meaning from a large number of monks. The consequences of such an act are so serious that the karmic

imprints created through such an act are more difficult to eliminate than those of having committed a wrong against the Buddha or the *Dharma.* Even after the application of the four opponent forces, consequences may still be experienced in such a form as headaches and toothaches. This is because, if the collective wealth of a monastic group is stolen, it is difficult to confess before all members of the group and to return to each his portion of what was stolen. Having developed great regret you must confess and return what was stolen before the monks have dispersed. If you were to delay doing so until the monks have gathered again, it would be unlikely that all those previously there would again be present. Thus it would be difficult to eliminate such non-virtue completely. Stealing offerings yourself or sending or encouraging someone else to do so both constitute this type of theft.

The text next mentions the five unbounded heinous actions. These are killing your father, mother, or a saint liberated from cyclic existence, causing a schism among the *sangha* and intentionally drawing blood from a Fully Awakened Being. The first three and the last of these crimes are not very common, but causing a schism among followers of the *Dharma* is dangerously possible so you must exercise great caution to avoid such an action. Many scriptures state that the Doctrine will not be destroyed by external foes but by dissension and conflict from within. No one Buddhist tradition should be set against another as they are all valid paths that lead to the same goal and differ only in the techniques they employ to suit differing dispositions and inclinations of the adherents. Holding sectarian views shows that your eye of intelligence is as small as the eye of a needle.

Five lesser heinous crimes are mentioned in Vasubhandu's *Treasury of Higher Truths,* namely (i) attempting to

cause a female saint to lose the purity of her vows; (ii) killing a *bodhisattva* who is in a definite position to attain Buddhahood; (iii) killing an *Arya* who is still learning and has not reached the path of no more learning; (iv) stealing or taking monastic funds and (v) destroying objects of worship.

The text then mentions the ten non-virtuous actions, three of the body (killing any living being, stealing, and sexual misconduct), four of speech (lying, slander, harsh language, and senseless chatter) and three of mind (craving, ill-will and wrong views).

There follows a list of some of the unsatisfactory states you may be born into because of the force of ripening *karma* created by previous contaminated actions. One teacher has said that our past non-virtues and their imprints are as numerous as the heirlooms of an ancient family. The mass of our unskilful instincts is like a royal treasury; though many beings are materially very poor, all are rich in traces of non-virtue, which are actually limitless. Meditate deeply on this, arouse a strong feeling of regret and confessing often, dedicate your merits.

The dedication of sources of virtue and merit to the "unsurpassable" refers to the Perfect Truth Body of Primordial Awareness, *(ye-shes chos-sku, Jnanadharmakaya),* the wisdom of the Buddhas. "That of which there is no higher" is the Perfect Body of Universal Essence *(ngo-bo-nyid sku, Svabhavikakaya),* the essence of Buddha's wisdom empty of true existence. "That which is even higher than the high" refers to the Perfect Body of Enjoyment *(longs-spyod sku, Sambhogakaya)* endowed with the five certainties enjoyed only by Superior *Aryas.* It is above the high, that is a tenth stage Awakening Warrior. The "supreme surmounting even the supreme" refers to the perfect body of Emanation *(spul-sku, Nirmanakaya),* the person or personality of an en-

lightened being appearing to ordinary people. They are the supreme of even the supreme because such a Perfect Body is the spiritual superior to even Hearer and Solitary Realiser Foe Destroyers, as well as Awakening Warriors abiding in the pure stages, the eighth, ninth and tenth spiritual levels.

Towards the end of the *sutra* it says "all wrongs individually I confess" implying that as soon as an individual wrong is done you lay it bare. According to another interpretation, it refers to a transgression of vows, to be confessed in front of the individuals against whom the infraction was made. Transgressions of ordination vows are confessed before the five monks who administered the vows. Laymen confess to their spiritual teacher. Transgressions of bodhisattva vows are confessed before the visualised assembly of Awakened Beings and their spiritual sons. Broken *tantric* commitments are confessed before the celestial mansion *(dkyil-'khor, mandala)* of one's personal deity *(yi-dam, istadevata)* and its entourage.

After this confession you "rejoice" in the merit of all beings, "beseech" the fully Awakened Beings to turn the wheel of the Dharma teachings and "request" them to live long lives, remaining in this world. This is followed by activation of the awakening mind and the text then concludes with praise and refuge.

If you follow this method of applying the four opponent forces in combination with repeating the names of the thirty-five Awakened Beings once or twice only, you may not feel that obstacles from previous non-virtues have been eliminated. This is simply because they are so abundant, having been accumulated over aeons of time. However, if you repeat the practice many times while prostrating with deep faith in the power of the prayer, it will be very effective.

Practice should be continued until some signs of purification occur. Frequent dreams of vomiting food or poison, eating yoghurt or drinking milk, seeing sunrise or moonrise, flying through the sky, bursting into flames, seeing something burning, overcoming buffaloes or figures dressed in black, meeting monks or nuns, sitting on lion-supported thrones, riding horses or elephants, and listening to spiritual teachings are a few such signs. If such indications occur five or more times fairly consecutively, it is good sign of purification. Should they happen but once it may be just by chance. An even clearer indication of successful purification is your intelligence becoming sharper, enabling you to penetrate into deeper subjects with increased comprehension. If this method of applying the four opponent forces is performed daily, insights in meditation will also increase.

Therefore, whether you are a layman or are ordained, this practice is of great benefit and will lead to the ultimate realisation of the Fully Awakened State.

Notes and References

1. From the *Bodhisattvacaryavatara,* Chapt. 5, stanza 98, published by L.T.W.A. and the *Śiksasamuccaya (bslab-btus)* translated into English by C. Bendall and W.H.D. Rouse *Siksha-samuccaya,* Delhi, Motilal Banarsidas, 1971.
2. It will be noted that this classification of the "Three Heaps" differs somewhat from that given by Nagarjuna.
3. H.V. Guenther states that "essentially *mantra* is a name for symbolic transformation processes and their experience, in which language partakes, being, as it were, its final shape. Inseparable from mind, *mantra* is its activity as such." *(Dawn*

of Tantra, Berkeley, Shambhala, 1975.) It is defined as "that which protects the mind."

4. "Aspiration for the path" according to F. Fremantle and Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead,* Berkeley, Shambhala. 1975, is "often translated simply as prayer but means literally 'wish path' *(smon-lam).* It is not a request to an external deity, but a method of purifying and directing the mind. It acts as an inspiration by arousing the mind's inherent desire for good, which attracts the fulfilment of its aim."
5. *Abhidharmakosakarika, Chos-mngon-pa'i mdzod-kyi tshig-le'ur byas-pa.*
6. *Abhidharmasamuccaya, Chos-mngon-pa kun-btus.*
7. *Glorious* appears to have been added to many of the Tibetan editions.
8. *Conqueror* also appears to have been added to many of the Tibetan editions.

Part 2
Vajrasattava Practice

The Practice of Vajrasattva
A Sadhana of Vajrasattva



Vajrasattva

The Practice of Vajrasattva

The Adamantine-Minded Warrior

by Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, Geshe Rabten
and Gegen Khyentse
(based on the Tibetan oral transmission)

INTRODUCTION

Homage to Vajradhara, holder of the adamantine sceptre.
Homage to the spiritual master, holder of the lineage.

The essential prerequisite for anyone wishing to receive empowerment into Buddhist *tantric* meditations is to take refuge in the Three Supreme Jewels. Such refuge must be based on a firm knowledge of the reasons for seeking refuge as outlined in such texts as the *Graduated Path of Enlightenment (lam-rim).* It is also important to have developed an attitude of renunciation towards the myriad of distractions of worldly existence: the thought definitely to leave cyclic existence. Furthermore, it is of special importance to generate the awakening mind or *bodhicitta,* the motivation and source of energy for the intensive practice of *tantric* meditations. By following the *tantric* path, it becomes possible to attain the fully awakened state within one lifetime, in as little as three, twelve or sixteen years.

Emphasising the necessity to cultivate the awakening mind, the Indian teacher Santideva said in the *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* that "all other virtues are like a plantain tree" which bears fruit only once. The merit from most virtuous actions is exhausted once the result is produced, but "awakening mind is like a divine tree in

paradise" which is always blossoming. The awakening mind continues to bear fruit for both oneself and others until the attainment of Buddhahood, when its benefits become infinite. Śantideva also said:

> Just as the alchemist's stone turns base metals to gold,
> When this impure body is touched by the awakening mind,
> It becomes the body of an Awakened Being.
> Therefore firmly hold onto this awakening mind.

The generation of this thought to attain enlightenment for the sake of others begins the transformation of ordinary human existence into that of an Awakened Being. The catalyst for this transformation is the awakening mind. This distinguishes the practice of the Great Vehicle from that of the Lesser. It is the essence of the teachings and should permeate all activities and meditations.

The awakening mind has two aspects. The first is compassion, and has as its object all other sentient beings. Realising that, since beginningless time, all living beings have been related to us as mother or father throughout innumerable previous lives produces an understanding that all beings have been immensely kind as much as our present mother. A mother shows kindness by providing her child with the opportunity to receive a precious human birth. She cares for her young, giving them sustenance, protection from fears and dangers, and guidance in skills they must learn in order to survive. Thus, we have received great kindness from all beings. Yet all sentient beings are enmeshed in a state of dissatisfaction and intense misery. We should desire to repay their kindness by leading them from this state of suffering and confusion to a state of absolute perfection, and should realise that in order to be

able to do so, we must have reached such a state ourselves. In this way compassion - the wish for others to be free from their misery - leads to the generation of the altruistic mind aspiring for and venturing into the practices leading to Buddhahood.

The second aspect of the awakening mind is insight into emptiness, the true nature of all phenomena. The aspect has as its object the fruit of practice, and concerns teachings on the ultimate truth which cultivate a vision of this goal.

Every meditation of the Great Vehicle, whether *sutra* or *tantra,* should be flavoured with the aspiration to work uninterruptedly for the benefit of others. On such a foundation one can build a solid practice such as Vajrasattva meditation through which one can realise the goal.

Those having tantric empowerment *(dbang, abhiseka)* from a fully qualified master are authorized to visualise themselves in the form of a deity. This accelerates the development of meditational insight into the actual nature of reality. *Tantric* meditations are distinguished from those of *sutra* by (i) a diversity of method suited to individual psychological needs; (ii) utilisation of very subtle levels of consciousness and sharp intelligence; (iii) comparative ease of practice[1] and (iv) rapid attainment of results. So, whenever there is the occasion to receive a *tantric* empowerment, you should, properly and with the correct motivation, seek to take advantage of the opportunity.

It is best, prior to receiving an empowerment, to have realised to some degree the three principal aspects of the path: renunciation, the intention definitely to leave cyclic existence; the awakening mind, the altruistic aspiration to become fully awakened for the sake of all beings; and the realisation of emptiness. But if empowerments were restricted to those who actually had developed the awakening mind, almost everyone would be excluded. Thus it is

stipulated that, at the very least, you should have an intellectual understanding of these three principal aspects of the path.

You may question whether progress can be made in *tantra* with this intellectual insight alone. If one interprets the prerequisites too strictly then there will never come a time when one is adequately prepared for practice. Intellectual understanding of *dharma* creates a vision of that which transcends the intellect and thus is necessary for the development of intuitive meditational insight. Receiving an empowerment is advantageous in that it opens the gate to the secret teachings of the Adamantine Vehicle *(rdo-rje theg-pa, vajrayana)*. Therefore, even though possessing merely a relative understanding of the three principal aspects of the path, still one should take an empowerment.

Keeping purely the *tantric* vows and pledges, which are administered during the empowerment along with the bonds or commitments of an Awakening Warrior, results in the more rapid attainment of realisations. However, should one break the commitments, it can lead to dire consequences. Even though it entails risk, still you should fearlessly follow the *tantric* path in order to benefit all sentient beings by quickly attaining complete realisation. The pledges are easily transgressed and Vajrasattva meditation has the power to purify and restore them. For that reason it should be practiced in conjunction with other *tantric* meditations.

Since this present age is even more degenerate and confused than the distant past and since *tantric* teachings are becoming widely dispersed, it is imperative for those who have a sincere wish to follow *tantra* to receive correct explanations. This will at least implant proper instincts on the minds of such aspirants. It is for this reason that this commentary is being made generally available. It is said, however, that making *tantric* procedures accessible for study

to someone without the proper initiation is like placing a priceless work of art into the hands of a child.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that because one does not visualise oneself as a deity, the meditation of Vajrasattva does not require an empowerment. He adds, however, that it assumes one already has had an empowerment into one of the four classes of *tantra* and is meditating on Vajrasattva in the context of a wider *tantric* 'method for accomplishment' *(sgrub-thubs, sadhana).* At the very least, it requires a 'scriptural permission' *lung* transmitted from a spiritual master, and should be practised under his personal guidance.

VISUALISATION AND PRACTICE

Simplified

It is said that unwholesome actions in general can best be eliminated by taking the commitments or bonds of an Awakening Warrior. For those who have taken and broken them the best remedy is recitation of the *Sutra of Three Heaps* or repetition of the mystic formula: *OM PADMO USNISA VIMALE HUM PHAT* [3] However, recitation of the hundred-syllable *mantra* of Vajrasattva, together with visualisation, is most effective for eliminating all types of unskilful actions since it has the power to purify weakened or broken *tantric* vows. Having gone for refuge and having generated the awakening mind you should proceed with the following visualisation.

On the top of your head visualise the upright letter *PAM.* This, like all other aspects of the visualisation, should be of white light, translucent and clear, symbolising purity. Once this is clearly seen in the mind's eye, it is transformed into a lotus, like a neon sign transforms a letter into a figure. On the lotus visualise the upright letter *AH* which changes into

a white crystal lunar dtop of this moon-disc, visualise the upright letter *HUM.* This changes into an upright five-spoked vajra-sceptre. Inside the central hub of the sceptre is the letter *HUM.* From the centre of this letter innumerable rays of light blaze forth to all ten directions, reaching every sentient being. The lights purify eliminating mental confusion. Alternately, visualise many hundreds of Vajrasattvas on the ends of the rays of light, empowering all beings with whom they come in contact. The light rays are drawn back into the sceptre and the *HUM* which then transform into Vajrasattva, who holds a sceptre in his right hand placed at his heart and a bell in his left hand resting on his hip. He is marked with all the signs of a Fully Awakened Being and is adorned with the or-naments of the Perfect Body of Enjoyment, or *Sambhogakaya.* One should spend some time meditating creatively on the form of Vajrasattva, clearly visualising it above one's head.

Next, at Vajrasattva's heart, visualise another moon-disc with the seed-syllable *HUM* standing in its centre. Visualise around the circumference of the moon-disc the letters of the hundred syllable *mantra,* standing upright and facing inwards. Since the letters revolve in a clock-wise direction, they should be visualised as being arranged on the disc counter-clockwise. Alternately, they may be visualised as stationary in which case they are positioned clockwise.[5] Since all elements of the visualisation are white, and it may be difficult to distinguish their respective shapes, one may visualise the moon-disc silver and the letters pearly white. As one recites the *mantra,* the letters circle the moon-disc in a clockwise direction pouring forth white nectar and light rays that rain down, purifying all traces of wrong actions of body, speech and mind. Having eliminated all impurities, rejoice and merge with Vajrasattva, becoming of 'one taste.

In daily meditation, repeat the hundred-syllable *mantra* twenty-one or 108 times. Although this does not necessarily eliminate the bad consequences of previous actions, it prevents them from doubling and increasing each day. If there is not enough time to say the entire *mantra,* simply repeat *OM VAJRASATTVA HUM.*

ELABORATE VISUALISATION

Before performing any advance *Mahayana* practice, such as this, one should first take refuge and generate the awakening mind. Although there are traditional stanzas to be recited, it is sufficient to repeat the following four lines to prepare the mind for practice:

In the Supreme Awakened One, his Teaching and the Spiritual Community
I go for refuge until Full Awakening.
By the merit of practising giving and other perfections,
May I accomplish Full Awakening for the benefit of all beings.

Begin by visualising the seed syllable *PAM* above your head. This stands for the Sanskrit word *papa,* meaning evil or neurosis, and represents all unskilful actions. Destroy it and replace it with a pure white eight-petalled lotus having a slightly yellow corolla. When this visualisation is quite clear, slowly change the corolla into a white letter *AH* which then turns into a moon-disc, the same size as the lotus and resting on top of it. Then, standing upright on the lunar disc, appears the letter *HUM,* which slowly dissolves into a white, five spoked *vajra* sceptre marked with the letter *HUM* at its hub. The seed syllable *AH* symbolises the speech-power of a Fully Awakened Being, and the syllable *HUM*

represents the blissful understanding of the non-duality of emptiness conjoined with compassion, or intelligent awareness along with skilful means *(thabs, upaya).*[6] Since it is this syllable HUM that transforms into the deity, Vajrasattva thus represents the understanding of emptiness inseparable from compassion within the mind of an Awakened Being. The fact that he is seated on a stainless moon, which has arisen from the letter *AH,* shows that he has the power of speech by which he is able to teach all sentient beings the path of Full Awakening.

Then, from the white sceptre marked with *HUM* in its centre, many light rays radiate out to the ten directions. First, they reach Fully Awakened Beings and present offerings to them. The Awakened Ones bestow their blessings of body, speech and mind, and the lights return to melt into the sceptre. The light shines forth again with a Vajrasattva at the end of each ray, going out to each and every sentient being, empowering them, eliminating their emotional afflictions and purifying them completely. Again the rays of light return and re-absorb into the sceptre which then dissolves into light and transforms into Vajrasattva, who is pure white, illuminating everything like a sunrise.

Vajrasattva can be visualised alone, in the context of *Yoga Tantra,* or with consort in the context of *Highest Yoga Tantra.* If your teacher instructs you to visualise Vajrasattva alone, he is often seated in the *lalita* posture with his right leg slightly extended. When the *mantra* is repeated the nectars and lights flow forth from his big toe. If he is visualised in union with his consort, they are to be visualised as follows.

Vajrasattva is white, with one head and two arms. He is seated, legs crossed in the adamantine posture. With his right hand he holds a sceptre at his heart and with his left a bell at his hip. Most of his hair is tied up in a three-tier

hair knot surmounted by a precious jewel. He has a hair between his eyebrows that curls clockwise. He is adorned with the eight precious ornaments associated with the Perfect Body of Enjoyment of an Awakened Being: a golden crown inlaid with five wish-fulfilling gems; a pair of gold earrings; armlets; bracelets and anklets; a necklace; a necklace extending to his chest; another extending to his waist; and around his waist a golden belt or girdle hung with strings of pearls. He is draped in five silken garments: a half-length shirt with short sleeves; across his shoulders, an ornamented poncho-like garment; draped over his crown and hanging down to below his ears, a pair of multi-coloured silk strips; dangling down his back, beautiful silk tassles; and on the lower part of his body, a five-coloured silken garment. He is handsome and smiles peacefully.

His consort Dor-je Nyem-ma (rdo-rje snyem-sma) is also white and embraces her lord with her hands crossed behind his neck. She holds in her right hand a curved vajra-blade and in her left a white skull-cup filled with blood. She is naked, her two legs in the lotus position encircle her lord, touching behind his back. Although here her hands are to be visualised crossed, you may be instructed to visualise her right arm extended straight while her left embraces her lord. Also in certain practices she may not be naked but may wear a silken skirt and be adorned with scarves and various ornaments. You should practise this visualisation until it becomes quite clear.

One may wonder why the *tantric* deities have specific characteristics, or even why they are used in Buddhist practice at all, since Buddhism is supposed to be non-theistic. No verbal predicates apply to the ultimate level of truth where things are uncompounded, for the state of a Fully Awakened Being transcends concepts and verbalisations. This ultimate state of beings is called the Perfect Body

of Truth, or *Dharmakaya.* Manifestations may appear from this state to ordinary sentient beings indicating symbolically the excellent qualities of that ultimate state. These are generally known as the Perfect Bodies of Form, or *Rupakaya* which has two aspects: the Perfect Body of Enjoyment or *Sambhogakaya,* and the Perfect *Body* of Emanation, or *Nirmanakaya.*

The bodies of all samsaric beings in the world result from the fruition of past deluded actions. However, in the case of Fully Awakened Beings, their forms express the inconceivable, excellent qualities of their realisations, the Perfect Body of Truth. In the case of *tantric* deities, their bodily configurations, the various implements they hold, their colours, postures and so forth are signs indicative of their inner excellences. Thus when visualising deities one should be aware of the symbology associated with each aspect of their forms.

The white lotus beneath Vajrasattva signifies that his mind-stream is uncontaminated by the faults of cyclic existence, just as a lotus rises unpolluted from the mire of a swamp. Moreover, just as creatures are afflicted by the heat of the sun and soothed by the coolness of moonlight, so the lunar disc relieves sentient beings from the pain arising from emotional afflictions and misery. Vajrasattva's two legs crossed in the adamantine position symbolise that, on the one hand, his great compassion prevents him from attaining for himself alone the peace of merely trans-worldly liberation (the goal of the *Hinayanist)* while, on the other hand, though he remains in cyclic existence to help other, his intelligent awareness cognising the emptiness of inherent existence safeguards him from being affected by worldly entanglements.

Vajrasattva's body is white, symbolising complete purity. He has one face because his mind is single-pointed and he

sees all phenomena as being of 'one taste' within the expanse of emptiness. The five jewels on his crown stand for the five wisdoms. His hair arranged in a top knot surmounted by a jewel indicates that he is the all-pervading lord of both cyclic existence and *nirvana,* the state 'beyond the sorrow' of grasping at inherent existence. His right arm stands for the conventional truth and his left for the ultimate truth. The sceptre in his right hand symbolises method, which in *tantra* is great bliss or eternal delight *(bde-ba chen-po, mahasukha)* and the bell in his left hand stands for the wisdom of intelligent awareness, the penetrative insight into emptiness. Thus his two arms indicate the indivisibility of method and wisdom. His eight ornaments indicate that in *tantric* practice all objects of desire are brought into the path and ornament the yogi having insight into emptiness. The five silken garments symbolise the four ways of gathering disciples,[9] or the four kinds of Buddha-activity.[10] Vajrasattva himself symbolises great bliss; his consort,

Vajrasattva himself symbolises great bliss; his consort, emptiness, while their union represents the inseparability of these two. The red blood in the white skull-cup which the consort holds represents emptiness and the cup itself stands for the realisation of the compassionate aspect of the Awakened Mind, which is great bliss. The vajra-blade indicates the necessity of cutting away the belief in a self-sufficient ego by using the broad blade of intelligent awareness.

The deity has no inherent existence, no substantiality like wood or stone, nor is it a two-dimensional figure as in a painting. It is like a reflection in a mirror. When you look at a mirror you see yourself, yet if you investigate the reflection, you find that it contains none of the elements of a real person. In the same way, the visualised image of a deity is empty of inherent existence, yet you cannot say that

it does not exist. It appears before your mind's eye just as all phenomena appear, but it has no nature of it own just as all phenomena have no self-existent characteristics.-

Within the central axis of the translucent bodies of Vajrasattva and his consort, visualise a white *OM* at the level of the brow, a red *AH* at the throat and a blue HUM at the heart. *OM* stands for the body of an Awakened Being, *AH* represents the speech and the *HUM* symbolises the blissful mind comprehending emptiness. The *HUM* stands on a moon-disc and changes from blue to white, and the hundred-syllable *mantra* appears standing on the edge of the lunar disc encircling the *HUM.* During repetition of the *mantra,* the hundred-syllables rotate clockwise, and nectars and rays of light flow continuously from the letters and the seed syllable *HUM.*

Once you have visualised Vajrasattva above your head in this way, you should visualise a lunar disc within your own heart. Visualise yourself standing in the centre of this disc surrounded by numberless sentient beings representing the inhabitants of the six realms, appearing in Human form but not suffering their respective fates. Then lights radiate from the *HUM* in the heart of Vajrasattva, and pour through the moon-disc and lotus, entering the crown of your head, flowing into your heart to all the sentient beings including yourself. Along with the light rays come innumerable small Vajrasattvas who settle above the heads of the beings in your heart and bestow purifying empowerments which eliminate all their defilements and faults. The rays re-absorb into the seed syllable and *mantra,* leaving the sentient beings purified, and all rejoice at the elimination of negativities. Once again light rays emanate from the *mantra and* the seed syllable, blazing out to all ten directions. At the end of each ray, thousands of goddesses present offerings to all en-lightened beings and their sons, who are so delighted that

they send forth the purifying excellence of their body, speech and mind. The lights re-absorb bringing back all these qualities to Vajrasattva, reinforcing his power and purity.

Having completed these preliminary visualisations you should repeat the *mantra.* The visualisation of the moon disc at your heart, with all the beings including yourself upon it, should still be maintained.

RECITATION OF THE MANTRA

The hundred-syllable *mantra* of Vajrasattva in Sanskrit is as follows (with the pronunciation in parenthesis):

OM VAJRASATTVA/	(om vajrasattva)
SAMAYAMANUPALAYA/	(samayam anupalaya)
VAJRASATTVA TVENO PATISTHA/	(vajra sattva tveno patishta)
DRDHO ME BHAVA/	(dridho me bhava)
SUTOSYO ME BHAVA/	(sutoshyo me bhava)
SUPOSYO ME BHAVA/	(suposhyo me bhava
ANURAKTO ME BHAVA/	(anurakto me bhava)
SARVA SIDDHI ME PRAYACCHA/	(sarva siddhi me prayaccha)
SARVA KARMA SUCCHA ME/	(sarva karma succha me)
CHITTAM SRIYAM KURU HUM/	(chittam shriyam kuru hung)
HA HA HA HA HO/ BHAGAVAN/	(ha ha ha ha ho/ bhagavan)
SARVA TATHAGATA/	(sarva tathagata)
VAJRA MA ME MUNCA	(vajra ma me muncha)
VAJRA BHAVA/	(vajra bhava)
MAHASAMAYASATTVA/	(maha samaya sattva)
ĀHHUM*PHAT/*	(ah hung phat)

OM (spelt *A-O-M)* consist of three letters symbolising respectively the body, speech and mind of a Fully Awakened Being. *SAMAYAM ANUPALAYA* means 'protect my commitment.' The *samaya* is the sacred word of honour you pledge

ཧཱུ།　　ཨོཾ་བཛྲ་ས་ཏྭ་ས་མ་ཡ།

མ་ནུ་པཱ་ལ་ཡ།　བཛྲ་ས་ཏྭ་ཏྭེ་ནོ་པ་ཏི་ཥྛ།

དྲི་ཌྷོ་མེ་བྷ་ཝ།　སུ་ཏོ་ཥྱོ་མེ་བྷ་ཝ།

སུ་པོ་ཥྱོ་མེ་བྷ་ཝ།　ཨ་ནུ་ར་ཀྟོ་མེ་བྷ་ཝ།

ས་རྦ་སི་དྡྷི་མེ་པྲ་ཡ་ཙྪ།　ས་རྦ་ཀ་རྨ་སུ་ཙ་མེ།

ཙི་ཏྟཾ་ཤྲི་ཡཾ་ཀུ་རུ་ཧཱུྃ།　ཧ་ཧ་ཧ་ཧ་ཧོཿ

བྷ་ག་ཝཱན་ས་རྦ་ཏ་ཐཱ་ག་ཏ།　བཛྲ་མ་མེ་མུ་ཉྩ།

བཛྲ་བྷ་ཝ།　མ་ཧཱ་ས་མ་ཡ་ས་ཏྭ་ཨཱ་ཧཱུྃ་ཕཊ་ཊ།

Lantsa Script

when taking vows, *TVEN[A]* means *'by* you'; *[U]PATISTHA* means 'cause me to be supported,' the final *A* and initial *U* combine into an O according to Sanskrit grammar. DRDHO means 'firm'; *ME* means 'myself or 'me'; and *BHAVA* means 'to be.' Thus these two phrases mean 'may I be upheld by you. Remain firmly with me.'

SUTOSYO ME BHAVA means 'may you be pleased with me.' *SUPOSYO ME BHAVA* means 'may you be happy with me' *ANURAKATO ME BHAVA* means 'have affection for me.' *SARVA* means 'all'; *SIDDHI* means 'powerful attainments'; and *ME PRAYACCHA* means 'bestow on me.' Thus, 'Bestow on me all powerful attainment.' *KARMA* means 'actions'; *SUCCHA ME* means 'make me good.' Thus the whole phrase means 'make all my actions good.' *CITTAM* means 'mind'; *SRIYAM* means 'most glorious'; and *KURU* means 'to make.' Thus, 'Please make my mind most glorious.' *HUM* is the seed syllable representing primordial awareness.

The syllables *HA HA HA HA HO* symbolise the five types of pristine awareness, or wisdom. The first symbolises the mirror-like pristine awareness which is the spontaneous and simultaneous understanding of the true nature of everything. The second, the pristine awareness of equality, is the feeling of pure equanimity towards happiness and suffering, good and bad, and so forth. The third is the pristine awareness of differentiation. This is the recognition and understanding of the difference between individual objects in the world. The fourth, all accomplishing pristine awareness, is that which enables one to complete various activities in the interest of other. The fifth is the pristine awareness of the expanse of *Dharma.* This is the understanding of emptiness.

BHAGAVAN generally means 'the Blessed One,' but the Tibetan translators distinguished this epithet of Buddha by translating it as the 'Endowed Transcendent Destroyer.' He has destroyed all obscurations of the mind, is endowed with

all excellent qualities and has gone beyond worldly existence. *SARVA* means 'all'. *TATHAGATA* is another epithet of **Buddha meaning 'One Thus-Gone';** ***MĀ ME MUÑCA*** **means** 'do not abandon me'; *VAJRA BHAVA* means 'being of adamantine nature'; and *MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA* means 'one with the great commitment.'

AH shows the non-self-existent nature of all phenomena. In Sanskrit grammar it is a negative prefix, and is also the seed syllable for Buddha's speech. It is the conclusion of the *mantra* because the main function of an Awakened Being's speech is to teach that all phenomena have no true existence. *HUM* and *PHAT* are omitted in some traditions. *HUM* stands for the blissful state of Vajrasattva's pristine awareness. *PHAT* in Sanskrit means 'torn' or 'rent asunder' and thus is a word symbolising destruction. All defilements of the mind and external harms are destroyed by this sound.

The whole *mantra* may be rendered into English in the following way:

Om Vajrasattva
Protect my commitment
Vajrasattva, may I be upheld by you
Remain firmly with me
May you be pleased with me
May you be happy with me
Have affection for me
Bestow on me all powerful attainments
Make all my actions good
Make my mind most glorious
Hung! Ha ha ha ha ho
O Endowed Transcendent Destroyer
The Vajra of all Ones Thus-Gone
Do not abandon me

You whose nature is adamantine
One with the great commitment
Ah Hung Phat

However, in Buddhist practice *mantras* and mystic formulae are never recited in translation but always in their original language, Sanskrit, the sacred language of celestial beings. The *mantra* should be repeated neither too slowly nor too quickly and should be combined with one of the three following visualisations.

First, visualise nectars and lights flowing down from Vajrasattva, penetrating the crown of your head, passing down to the sentient beings at your heart and eliminating their mental afflictions as well as your own. You may visualise the afflictions within the minds of sentient beings as dirty water. After the action of the nectars, this fluid is forcefully expelled through the pores and orifices of the lower part of your body. When it has passed out, visualise all sentient beings and yourself as being pure, like sparkling crystal.

Second, the light from the seed syllable and *mantra* comes down through the crown of your head and enters the bodies of all sentient beings, filling them from their toes up. It forces upwards all non-virtuous actions, appearing like scum on the nectar's surface, out through the eyes, ears, mouths and crowns of the heads of these beings as well as your own. Again, everyone becomes pure like crystal glass. You can visualise these evil actions in the form of scorpions, insects, pus and various excretions.

The third way is to visualise black spots, representing all unwholesome actions, at your heart and the hearts of all beings. The strong flow of nectars and lights comes forth from the *mantra* and seed syllable at Vajrasattva's heart and

destroys these non-virtues as a light dispels the darkness in a room.

Finally Vajrasattva says to you, "O fortunate child of my family, your wrongs and obstacles, and every broken and weakened commitment are cleansed and purified." Then Vajrasattva dissolves into brilliant light, enters your heart, and you and all visualised sentient beings become inseparably united with him. At this point you should remain in a state of unapprehendable meditation on emptiness for as long as possible and to the best of your ability. Afterwards you should recite as many prayers of aspiration and dedications as possible.

Notes and references

1. The unique inner meditations of the Effect Vehicle of *tantra* especially those of the *Highest Yoga Tantra* enable one to attain complete enlightenment within three, twelve, or sixteen years, whereas the causal path of the Perfection Vehicle of an Awakening Warrior involves the accumulation of the requisite merit over a period of three countless aeons, entailing hardships such as giving away one's body and limbs to others. Since *tantra* does not involve such hardships it is said to be comparatively easier. For Clarification of distinctions between *sutra* and *tantra* see Tsong-ka-pa and His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso the fourteenth Dalai Lama, *Tantra in Tibet,* George Alien & Unwin, London 1978.
2. Action, or *Kriya tantra,* Performance or *Carya tantra,* Union or *Yoga tantra* and Highest Union or *Anuttarayoga tantra.* The *Action tantras* are considered external since they emphasis ritual. The *Performance tantras* are partly external and partly internal since they place emphasis equally on ritual and internal yoga. The *Union tantras* are internal since they are chiefly concerned with the yoga of internal visualisation. The

Highest Yoga tantras are the highest teachings of Buddha and are described as perfectly internal since they point to the original nature of the mind in its primordial purity, like the clear empty sky, devoid of clouds. All deities depicted as being in sexual union belong to this latter classification of *tantra,* their union signifying the ultimate union of the wisdom of emptiness, represented by the *dakini* or female deity, with skilful means, represented by the *heruka* or male deity. This symbolism is not found in any lower *tantra.* The *Highest Yoga tantras* are classified into the Old System *(rnying-ma)* of translation - prior to the period of the translator Rinchen Zangpo (rin-chen bzang-po; 958-1051) - and the New System *(gsar-ma)* extending from his period onwards. The Old System includes *mahayoga, anuyoga* and *atiyoga.* The New System includes Father, Mother and Non-dual *tantras.* The Father *tantras* emphasise the Generation Process *(bskyed-rim, utpattikrama)* and the perfection of the Illusory Body *(rgyu-lus, mayadeha);* in them male deities predominate. The Mother *tantras* emphasise the Completion Process *(rdzogs-rim, sampannakrama)* and the perfection of the Clear Light *('od-gsal, prabhasvara);* in them female deities predominate. In the Non-dual *tantras* these two aspects are equally emphasised.

3. For a list and explanation of the vows of an Awakening Warrior see *The Guru Puja* prepared by the Translation Bureau of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, 1978.
4. This *mantra* is often placed over entrance ways to homes to ward off malignant forces. It is said in the *Heart of the Earth Sutra of Ten Cycles (Sa-snying 'khor-lo bcu-pa'i mdo)* that "whoever sees, hears, recollects or comes in contact with this ten-syllable king of mystic recitations will be purified of unbounded heinous actions and will be prevented from taking rebirth in bad destinies."

5. It is best to visualise all letters in the *lantsa* script of Sanskrit or, if that is not possible, in Tibetan script, see illustration p.92
6. *Upaya* in Sanskrit means strategy, tactics and skill in warfare. In Buddhism it means the strategy used in attacking psychological and emotional afflictions, and the skill used in leading others on the path.
7. In using the term "Perfect Body" for *kaya,* body should not be thought of as a physical body, but rather as a measure of specific spiritual experience.
8. The five wisdoms are mirror-like, equanimous, discriminating, all-accomplishing and all-pervading pristine awareness. For a clear description of these, and their relationship with colours, directions, emotional hindrances, elements and symbols, c.f. Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, *Visual Dharma,* Berkeley and London, Shambhala, 1975, pp. 24-26.
9. The four means of ripening disciples are: (i) giving material aid, (ii) speaking harmoniously, (iii) teaching in accordance with individual aspirations and dispositions and (iv) conducting one's own behaviour meaningfully.
10. Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, in *Visual Dharma* states that these four kinds of Buddha activity are "pacifying, enriching, magnetising and destroying. Pacifying means causing psychological imbalance or physical sickness to subside. Enriching means imbuing experience with a sense of richness; also giving physical wealth and long life. Magnetising means attracting power and powerful relationships which give controls over situations. Destroying means annihilating confusion and obstacles."

A Sadhana of Vajrasattva

A Mahayana Method for Accomplishment adapted from
The Union of the Three Purifications
of Glorious Cakrasamvara
(dpal-'khor-lo sdom-pa'i dag-pa gsum-gyi rnal-'byor)[1]

With annotations from an explanation by Geshe Rabten
Translated by Gonsar Tulku

REFUGE AND ACTIVATING THE AWAKENING MIND

To the Fully Awakened Being, his Truth and the Spiritual Aspirants, for all time I seek refuge.
To every being of the Three Vehicles and practitioners of the mystic recitation;
To the Space Goer,[2] the heroes, heroines and empowering goddesses;
To these great Awakening Warriors and above all to my spiritual master, for all time I seek refuge.
For the sake of every sentient being,
By becoming Vajrasattva myself,
May I lead all sentient beings unto that supreme state of Vajrasattva.

(repeat three times, then follow the meditation of Vajrasattva)

VISUALISATION

From the white *PAM* above the crown of my head appears a white lotus. From an *AH* in its centre appears a lunar throne, above which is a *HUM.* From this *HUM* arises a white, five spoked sceptre with its centre marked by a *HUM.* From it light rays blaze forth, perform the two purposes, return, condense, and completely transform into Vajra-

sattva. He is white, with one face and two hands, holding a sceptre in his right hand and a bell in his left. He is sitting in the adamantine posture embracing his consort, Dor-je Nyem-ma, who is white, with one face and two hands, holding a curved knife in her right hand and a skull-cup in her left. Both are adorned with fine flowing silks and various precious ornaments. At the top of both of their heads is an OM, within their throats is an *AH* and in their hearts in a *HUM.* From the HUM at their hearts radiant lights shine out, invoking the pristine-wisdom beings who are like themselves. *JAH HUM BAM HOH,* they become non-dual. Once again from the *HUM* at their hearts, radiant lights shine out invoking the empowering goddesses. "All Once Thus-Gone, I request you to bestow the actual empowerment." Having made the request in this way, the goddesses bear aloft vases brimming with the nectar of pristine awareness. OM *SARVA TATHAGATA ABHISẸKATA SAMAYA SRIYE HUM.* Thus the empowerment is granted. The body of Vajrasattva fills with the nectar of pristine awareness overflowing upon his head, transforming into Aksobhya who adorns his crown. Above a moon in Vajrasattva's heart is a HUM and on the edge of the moon revolves the hundred-syllable *mantra.*

"O Endowed Transcendent Destroyer Vajrasattva, I myself and others request you to cleanse wrongs and hindrances from all sentient beings and to purify every weakened and broken sacred word of honour." Having requested in this way, from the HUM together with the *mantra-rosary* in his heart, radiant lights shine out cleansing the wrongs and hindrances from all sentient beings and presenting offerings that delight the Awakened Beings and their spiritual sons. Every excellence of their body, speech and mind combines in the form of light and dissolves into the *mantra-rosary* and the HUM. From there a white stream of nectar flows, pouring from the place of union of the lord

and consort. It enters through the aperture at the crown of my head, filling my whole body with a stream of nectar of pristine awareness. I become purified by the cleansing of all evils and hindrances from my three doors.

MANTRA RECITATION

OM VAJRASATTVA/
SAMAYAM ANUPALAYA/
VAJRASATTVA TVENO PATISTHA/
DṚDHO ME BHAVA/
SUTOṢYO ME BHAVA/
SUPOṢYO ME BHAVA/
ANURAKTO ME BHAVA/
SARVA SIDDHI ME PRAYACCHA/
SARVA KARMA SUCCHA ME/
CHITTAM SRIYAM KURU HUM/
HA HA HA HA HO/ BHAGAVAN/
SARVA TATHAGATA/
VAJRA MA ME MUNCA/
VAJRA BHAVA/
MAHASAMAYASATTVA/
AH HUM PHAT/

(recite this twenty-one or more times)

CONCLUSION

Through my ignorance and delusions I have transgressed and weakened my pledges.
O my spiritual master, protect me and be my refuge.
Lord who holds the adamantine sceptre, the embodiment of great compassion,
The chief of all beings, I go to you for refuge.

In answer Vajrasattva replies, "O child of my family, your wrongs and hindrances and every broken and weakened commitment are cleansed and purified." Having spoken thus he dissolves into me, and my three doors become inseparable from the perfect body, speech and mind of Vajrasattva.

DEDICATION

Through this virtue, by quickly accomplishing the
state of Vajrasattva,
May I lead all beings to that state without excluding
even one.

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

The first stanza indicates that the objects of refuge are the Three Supreme Jewels and that you seek refuge in them now and always. The actual way of taking refuge, which is not based upon blind faith, involves complete conviction arising through knowing the qualities and characteristics of a true refuge object.[3] "All beings of the Three Vehicles" refers specifically to those Superior Spiritual Aspirants *(arya-sangha)* who have insight into emptiness on the path of seeing: either of the two Lesser Vehicles, those of Pious Hearers or Solitary Realisers; or on the path of the Great Vehicle. The beings next mentioned in the prayer are Great Vehicle practitioners who have generated the awakening mind and are endowed with the practices of the *tantric* path.

Seeking refuge completes the first of the four opponent forces against unskilful actions, the force of reliance. The meditation of Vajrasattva purifies the seeds of past unwholesome actions accumulated in this and previous lifetimes. Every non-virtuous action you have ever com-

mitted has been directed against either the Three Supreme Jewels or sentient beings. Therefore, for the purification of those committed against the Three Supreme Jewels, you seek refuge; and for the purification of those against sentient beings, you generate the awakening mind.

The visualisation of the lotus above your head can vary according to your disposition. For some people, it is easier to visualise it a few inches above their heads, while for others it must be visualised as touching the head. Either way is satisfactory although it is considered better to leave some space. In this practice it is a thousand-petalled lotus about six inches in diameter. This varies in accordance with specific instructions.

From the *HUM* in the centre of the white sceptre above the lunar disc that fits within the lotus, many light rays shine out in the ten directions. They first illuminate all sentient beings by relieving them of their miseries and purifying their mental defilements. Then, more lights blaze forth and make offerings to the Fully Awakened Beings. The light rays re-absorb into the *HUM,* bringing with them the blessings of the Buddhas' body, speech and mind. These are the two purposes that are fulfilled before the sceptre transforms into Vajrasattva.

The three syllables at the head, throat and heart of both the lord and consort can be visualised as white or as white, red and blue respectively. From their hearts radiant lights blaze out, inviting a multitude of Awakened Beings in the form of Vajrasattva and consort. As you recite *JAH,* they descend like snow-flakes and combine into one, above the visualised commitment-being *(dam-tsig sems-pa, samaya-sattva).* As you say *HUM,* these invited pristine-awareness beings *(ye-shes sems-pa, jnanasattva)* melt into their visualised counterpart. With the recitation of BAM they become united. When you say *HOH* they become blissfully and inseparably

united like pouring water into water. This process signifies the transformation from the conceptual visualisation of an imaginatively created commitment-being into the non-conceptual vision of the deity known as the 'primordial awareness being.'

From the HUM radiant light bursts forth once again invoking the empowering Buddhas of the five families and their consorts.[4] They hover in space above Vajrasattva. Some of the consorts hold aloft various auspicious symbols such as victory banners, eternal knots, conch shells and so on. Others scatter garlands and floral bouquets, while still others hold bejewelled vases filled with white nectar which is of the same nature as the fully awakened mind. They shower these various objects upon Vajrasattva and his consort. Although there are no obstacles to purify within the mind-stream of Vajrasattva, it is by these means that the empowerment is bestowed. The nectar enters Vajrasattva and his consort through their heads, fills their bodies and pours over the crown of the head of Vajrasattva. This excess drop transforms into Aksobhya, the lord of the Vajra Buddha family of Vajrasattva. He is blue in colour, holding a sceptre in his left hand on his lap and touching the earth with his right. The empowering deities then immediately dissolve into light and melt into Vajrasattva. In Vajrasattva's chest on a moon-disc is the letter *HUM,* now dazzling white. Surrounding this, standing on the edge of the disc, are the letters of the hundred-syllable *mantra,* facing inwards and vibrantly white like light bulbs. They can be visualised in either Sanskrit or Tibetan characters and can be imagined as the colour of a conch shell in slight contrast to the stainless moon-disc which is like snow.

At this point you should recollect all the unskilful actions you have committed and generate a strong sense of regret, a dispassionate feeling rather than an emotional

involvement with an overbearing guilt complex. It is the force of the tendencies towards these wrong deeds that has obscured your Buddha-nature until now. Strong remorse constitutes the opponent force of regret. At the same time you should realise that negative tendencies can be eliminated if you strongly resolve to refrain from committing such evil actions again. This intention to avoid repeating past unskilful acts constitutes the third of the four opponent forces. Urged by strong regret, you request Vajrasattva to absolve you from all these wrongs.

After he accepts this request, lights blaze out from the HUM in his heart, purifying all creatures of their emotional hindrances. This act of purification becomes an offering to the Awakened Beings and their spiritual sons, whose every excellence of body, speech and mind returns in the form of light to redissolve into the HUM. From the HUM and the mantra-rosary flows a stream of pure nectar, which fills the body of Vajrasattva, then passes into the body of his consort. Thereafter, flowing from the place of sexual union down through the moon and lotus, it enters your body via the pure aperture at the crown of your head.

The opponent forces of applying counter-measures involve: (1) the repetition of the hundred-syllable *mantra* for the purpose of purifying speech; (2) devotion for your spiritual master and the desire to eliminate neuroses in order to purify your mind; and (3) the action of the nectars and lights for purifying the body.

There are three ways that these nectars and lights can cleanse your body of all obscurations. First, they can slowly push all negativities - in the form of malevolent creatures and filth - downwards, forcing them out through the lower orifices of your body until they disappear into a crack in the earth below. Or the nectars and lights can overcome the darkness within like switching on a light, leaving your body

radiantly white. Lastly, they can fill your body starting from below and carry all neurotic tendencies in the form of unclean objects as scum on the surface of the nectar, finally expelling them through the apertures in your head. If you are doing a traditional retreat involving recitation of the *mantra* 100,000 times, these three methods can be alternated as you please.

If you have received a *tantric* empowerment and include this Vajrasattva Sadhana as part of your daily practices, you can perform the meditation in conjunction with the four types of empowerment, thereby implanting the seeds for attaining the four Perfect Bodies of a Fully Awakened Being. If a session is made up of four groups of seven recitations, the first group corresponds to the vase empowerment, which purifies the body and implants the seed to attain the Perfect Body of Emanation. In this visualisation the nectar pours through the body purifying physical defilements which are expelled through your lower parts. For the second group of seven, visualise the lights and nectars rising up through your body, purifying all verbal defilements and leaving through the upper orifices. This endows you with the power to attain the Perfect Body of Enjoyment, the speech of a Fully Awakened Being,[5] and grants you the secret empowerment. In the third, after making an earnest request that you may be purified of all mental hindrances, visualise the nectars entering your body and destroying all mental afflictions which appear as a black egg at your heart. This black egg is transformed into a pure crystal vase which implants the seed to attain the Perfect Body of Universal Essence. This grant you the fourth, or word empowerment.

The Vajrasattva meditation can be adapted for other purposes besides the purification of body, speech and mind. For example, as an opponent to a disease that will shorten your life-span, visualise the sickness at your heart and the

descending nectars as yellow in colour. For the lengthening of your lifespan and to increase your merit, visualise at your heart all ignorance or unfortunate circumstances which could shorten your life where again they are destroyed by yellow nectars. For the benefit of a person other than yourself who is sick, visualise his form or just his name at your heart in order to help heal him.

At the conclusion of the recitation of the *mantra* you seek refuge in Vajrasattva. He and his consort address you, absolving you of all wrongs. As they speak these words, you engender heart-felt conviction and immense gratitude. Vajrasattva and his consort then dissolve into light and enter your heart.

At the heart there is an indestructible point or drop *(thig-le, bindu)* which is the essence of your life. In this, is the most subtle consciousness *(sems, citta),* which is your essential mind, and the most subtle energy-wind or motility *(rlung, vayu),* which is your essential body. Together with these there is a power of speech which is your essential speech. The dissolution of Vajrasattva is into this inner body, speech and mind: not your coarse outer form. At this special moment, you should remain for as long as possible in meditative equipoise on emptiness.

In order for the virtues of this practice to grow you should conclude by dedicating the accumulated merit for the benefit of all sentient beings. Generally if you accumulate some good merit it will lead to long life, wealth or birth in a high realm. But when the accumulation of that merit is expended, the good fortune decreases. Such virtue is like a horse: without the reins of proper dedication it might go just anywhere. Or it is like a drop of water on a footpath; it will soon disappear. If, however, you create virtuous merit through practices such as Vajrasattva and dedicate it for the highest purpose, the result will never be wasted. Such merit

is like a drop of water falling in the ocean. As long as the ocean of Buddhahood remains, that drop will always be there. You should think that just as all Fully Awakened Beings of the past have dedicated their merit for the sake of all sentient beings, so you will dedicate your merit from the past, present and future in order to attain the Fully Awakened State for all living beings. Dedication perfects the virtue of the practices that have gone before. After this you can recite prayers of aspiration and so complete the meditation session in a supreme state of mind.

Notes and References

1. Available in the *Union with the Spiritual Master and Other Prayers (bla-ma'i rnal-Tjyor).* Tibetan Cultural Printing Press, Dharamsala, 1975. p. 279.
2. *The Composition in Two Sections* states that: a *dakini* is a *tantric* practitioner. The name "Space Goer" implies one who has attained mystical emanations such as the ability to move through space. A Dr'uka-pa Ka-gyü text on the Mahamudra preliminary practices states thus:

   > A *tantra* states "Accomplishing causes throughout all space are the highly renowned 'feminine space goers'." Unchanging pristine awareness *(rgyu-med-pa'i ye-shes)* moves into the space of the expanse of emptiness; they are integral and co-emergent.

   This reveals a hidden meaning of the term 'mover through space.' Here 'space' *(nam-mkha')* refers to the basic expanse of emptiness whereas 'mover' *('gro-ba)* indicates that the unchanging pristine awareness is the content of that expanse. Since from the beginning, they are not separate they are said to be integral *(zung-'jug, yuganaddha)* and co-emergent *(lhan-skyes, sahaja).*

3. Cf. Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, *Tibetan Tradition of Mental Development,* Dharamsala, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1974, 1976, 1978. pp. 65-68. Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, in *Visual Dharma* states that "taking refuge is a process of freeing oneself from the notion of an external refuge. It is often said in the Buddhist Scriptures that one should not take refuge in an external god or in an external protector, material or psychological, such as parents, relatives or wealth. Instead one should take refuge in the guru-buddha, the embodiment of the dharma, which is the nature of reality itself."
4. The five families *(rigs-lnga, pancakula)* are the Buddha, Ratna, Padma, Karma and Vajra families. These are white Vairocana, yellow Ratnasambhava, red Amitabha and green Amogha-siddhi, blue Aksobhya, who are associated with the eastern, southern, western, northern and central directions respect-ively. For the correlation between these and the visions of the *bardo,* or the stage between death and rebirth, Cf. F. Fremantle and Chogyam Trungpa. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead,* Berkeley and London, Shambala, 1975, pp. xviii-xix.
5. This reflects the *tantric* implication of the Three Perfect Bodies where the Perfect Body of Enjoyment is linked to the speech and communication of a Fully Awakened Being.

Dedication

May the merit from this brief work
Be shared by all beings
In this time of inner and outer turmoil
Bringing them ultimate peace and happiness.

Completed this full moon day of the seventh Tibetan month in the year of the Male fire-Dragon, 8 September 1976. Rally Cottage, Dharamsala, India.

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